

# Soviet Montage Cinema as Propaganda and Political Rhetoric

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*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of  
Professor Dietrich Scheunemann.*

Propaganda that stimulates thinking, in no matter what field, is useful to the cause of the oppressed.

---

Bertolt Brecht, 1935.

## Abstract

Most previous studies of Soviet montage cinema have concentrated on its aesthetic and technical aspects; however, montage cinema was essentially a rhetoric rather than an aesthetic of cinema. This thesis presents a comparative study of the leading montage film-makers – Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Vertov – comparing and contrasting the differing methods by which they used cinema to exert a rhetorical effect on the spectator for the purposes of political propaganda.

The definitions of propaganda in general use in the study of Soviet montage cinema are too narrowly restrictive and a more nuanced definition is clearly needed. Furthermore, the role of the spectator in constituting the rhetorical effectivity of a montage film has been neglected; a psychoanalytic model of the way in which the filmic text can trigger a change in the spectator's psyche is required. Moreover, the ideology of the Soviet montage films is generally assumed to exist only in their content, whereas in classical cinema ideology also operates at the level of the enunciation of the filmic text itself. The extent to which this is also true for Soviet montage cinema should be investigated.

I have analysed the interaction between montage films and their spectators from multiple perspectives, using several distinct but complementary theoretical approaches, including recent theories of propaganda, a psychoanalytic model of rhetoric, Lacanian psychoanalysis and the theory of the system of the suture, and Peircean semiotics. These different theoretical approaches, while having distinct conceptual bases, work together to build a new and consistent picture of montage cinema as a propaganda medium and as a form of political rhetoric.

I have been able to classify the films of Kuleshov, Eisenstein and Pudovkin as transactive, vertical agitation propaganda and the films of Vertov as transactive, horizontal agitation propaganda. Furthermore, I show that montage cinema embeds ideology in the enunciation of its filmic text, but differs from classical cinema in trying to subvert the suturing process. I conclude that Vertov at least partly created a non-representational cinematography and that he could be regarded as being at least as much a Suprematist film-maker as a Constructivist one.

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# Acknowledgements

My thanks first of all to the late Professor Dietrich Scheunemann, without whom neither my research nor this thesis would have happened; to Dr. Dorota Ostrowska, for her crucial help and encouragement; to Martine Pierquin for introducing me to film studies; and to Dr. Kate Forrest, for her Russian language tuition. My thanks also to the staff of Edinburgh University Library and the staff of the National Library of Scotland, for their unfailing helpfulness, and also to the staff of the British Film Institute for supplying copies of Soviet montage films and to the staff of the Scottish Screen Archive in Glasgow for providing viewing facilities. I am also profoundly grateful to Kate Marshall, the Administrative Officer of Edinburgh University's Graduate School of Literatures Languages and Cultures, for her efficient and indispensable help. And last, but by no means least, I would like to thank my parents, who made all of this possible.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Main focus of the research

To examine the nature of Soviet montage cinema as a form of rhetoric, as I intend to do in this thesis, is to implicitly make a distinction between aesthetics and rhetoric. Most studies of Soviet montage cinema have concentrated on its aesthetic and technical aspects, but montage cinema was essentially a *rhetoric* of cinema. It was a conscious attempt to use cinema as a medium for political propaganda. Whereas aesthetics is the study of what is pleasing and beautiful, rhetoric is the art of persuasion; that is, it is the set of techniques required to construct effective discourses. To examine a film as rhetoric is to examine the effect it has on its intended audience and the means by which it achieves that effect, and therefore to foreground considerations of the interaction between the filmic text and the spectator. I believe that what Jacques Aumont wrote two decades ago remains true even now:

it seems to me that almost all of Eisenstein's commentators underestimate the role of the mental processes of the spectator (imperative not only with regard to the intellectual work necessary for producing "good" association, but also with regard to the production of emotional "value"). (1987:169)

The fact that film montage itself is a form of rhetoric rather than simply an aesthetic device has long been recognised. Jowett and O'Donnell, for example, have stated that

[t]he great Russian propaganda films such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia* (1928), and

Alexander Dovzhenko's *Earth* (1930) all used montage as a central technique for eliciting the proper audience response. (1992:94)

Even Dziga Vertov's non-fiction documentary films have been recognised to be rhetorical discourses rather than merely re-presentations of actuality. As Plantinga has noted, "like the fiction film, nonfictions are rhetorical constructs, fashioned and manipulated and structured representations" (1997:32). Some critics have even recognised the montage films as a form of rhetorical discourse but have disapproved of that fact, such as Mikhail Bleiman in 1927:

Visually, [Vertov's film *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926)] is disappointing. It is a speech of an orator, not a picture. It is full of rhetorical devices, rhetorical repetitions. The film shouts out slogans, sometimes declaims. Declamation is the film's main drawback. Too many repetitive, obtrusive titles. They turn the film into a collection of moving photographs. (Qtd. in Tsivian 1997:67)

However, there have also been dissenting voices which have tried to downplay the role of Soviet montage cinema as political propaganda, apparently fearing that such a label would damage its artistic or even moral status. Richard Taylor has denied the value of montage cinema's function as propaganda by claiming that "to discuss each film in terms of whether it may be regarded as agitation or propaganda would be a worse than fruitless exercise, for it would actually obscure the real value of the film" (1998:29), and Peter Kenez has asserted that

[t]o look at the work of Soviet directors purely as an exercise in propaganda is to miss what is truly interesting in their work. [...] Only after the artistic vitality of film was destroyed in the 1930s did it become a successful instrument of propaganda. The study of film as an agent of indoctrination in the 1920s is ultimately – and fortunately from the point of view of art – a study in failure. (1985:196)

Such a view assumes two things: that there is a fundamental contradiction between art and propaganda, and that the films of Soviet montage cinema were failures as propaganda (and therefore, ipso facto, successes as great art). The second assumption is dubious at best – Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1926) was banned from being publically screened in Britain until the 1950s, precisely because of the authorities' fear of its power as propaganda, and Jowett and O'Donnell have reported that

[a] representative study that used attitude-measuring scales to determine propaganda effects was done by Rosenthal (1934), who found that Russian silent propaganda films changed socioeconomic attitudes of American students. (1992:127)

I would also dispute Kenez's other assumption, that art and propaganda are essentially incompatible things. The Soviet montage directors saw no contradiction between art and propaganda (Vertov, always the exception among the montage directors, denied that he was attempting to create art at all). To them, all art was fundamentally tendentious, political at its very root. To regard films like *Potemkin* or *The Mother* (1926) or *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) as propaganda is therefore not to denigrate them, or downgrade them from the status of great art to "mere" agitprop, but to acknowledge the motivations which lay behind their creation and to bring out those elements in these works which make them unique contributions to cinematic art.

## 1.2 Questions addressed

This thesis will address itself to several distinct yet closely connected questions relating to the nature and functioning of Soviet montage cinema as propaganda and the way in which the montage films rhetorically interact with their spectators.

I regard the usual definitions of propaganda in general use in the study of Soviet montage cinema (Taylor 1998, Kenez 1985) as being too narrowly restrictive and having too many ideological presuppositions to properly encompass the full range and diversity of the actual use of propaganda in the films of montage directors such as Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein or Dziga Vertov. How can the concept of propaganda be defined in such a way that it will be adequate when applied to the Soviet montage directors' complex use of their films as political propaganda? Furthermore, how can the concept of propaganda be subdivided into different categories based on its purposes and methods so as to provide an adequate categorisation of the differing approaches towards propaganda taken by the various montage film-makers?

When considering a film as a form of rhetoric, the issue of the nature of the interaction between the filmic text and the spectator arises. What is the actual mechanism by which the filmic text interacts with the psyche of the spectator in order to cause a change in that spectator's psyche? Such a change could be said

to be what constitutes the rhetorical effect of the film on its spectator.

The “Kuleshov Effect” montage experiment, which Bazin claimed “sums up perfectly the properties of montage” (2005:25), actually has a rather problematic status. It has recently been questioned whether the Effect even exists at all (Aumont 1986, Prince and Hensley 1992) and there has been a general lack of success of attempts to reproduce the Effect under scientifically rigorous conditions (Prince and Hensley 1992). Can the application of a psychoanalytic model of rhetoric (Alcorn 1987) shed some light on the effectivity of the Kuleshov Effect by providing a plausible psychoanalytic mechanism by which it might operate?

The ideology of the Soviet montage films is generally assumed to exist primarily or solely at the level of their overt content (e.g., Taylor 1998), whereas the theory of the “system of the suture” (Oudart 1978, Dayan 1974) suggests that, in classical cinema at least, ideology exists also, and perhaps even primarily, at the level of the enunciation of the filmic text; that is, in the process by which fragments of raw film footage are transformed into meaningful cinematographic statements. Could the theory of the system of the suture be applied to montage cinema as well as to classical cinema, and if so what would it reveal about the presence of political ideology in the *form* of the montage films as well as in their overt content? Furthermore, how far did montage cinema use the same suturing process as classical cinema, and how far did it try to subvert that suturing process? What implications does this have for the functioning of Soviet montage cinema as ideological rhetoric?

In his article on the system of the suture, Daniel Dayan asked whether there can be a cinematography not based on the system of representation, and answered his own question in the negative (1974:28). Could Soviet montage cinema have constituted, at least potentially, such a non-representational cinematography, and if so in what sense? Is Malevich’s concept of a “non-objective cinema” comparable to Dayan’s “non-representational cinematography”, and if so to what extent did the montage film-makers’ ideas and work conform to Malevich’s concept? And what implications would this have for the functioning of montage films as political rhetoric?

## 1.3 Methodology

It is my contention that montage cinema was essentially a rhetoric rather than an aesthetic of cinema, a conscious attempt to use cinema as a medium for political propaganda. It is therefore more appropriate, in my view, to apply a functional rather than a normative analysis to montage cinema, to use Peter Bürger's terminology (1984:87); that is, to analyse its political and social functioning rather than its set of aesthetic norms.

In this thesis, I shall analyse the interaction between montage films and their spectators from multiple perspectives, using several distinct but complementary theoretical approaches, including recent theories of propaganda (Ellul 1973, Jowett and O'Donnell 1992; 2006, Taylor 1998, O'Shaughnessy 2004), Lacanian psychoanalysis and the theory of the "system of the suture" (Lacan 1977, Oudart 1978, Dayan 1974) and the semiotics of C. S. Peirce (Peirce 1991, Wollen 1997:116-54). These different theoretical approaches, while having distinct conceptual bases and giving a variety of perspectives on the nature of Soviet montage cinema, work together to build what I believe to be a consistent picture of montage cinema as a propaganda medium and as a form of political rhetoric.

Similar theoretical approaches have been used by film theorists in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably the "*Screen* theory" group of critics who used Lacanian psychoanalysis, semiotics and Marxist theory (in particular Althusser's theorisation of the role of ideology in modern capitalist society) to analyse mainstream Hollywood movies in such a way as to attempt to unmask the procedures by which oppressive ideology is naturalisation by the filmic texts of such movies. As Lapsley and Westlake put it, "Because misrecognition and delusion still predominate, the task [...] is to unmask the reality of the situation and analyse the mechanisms producing misrecognition and mystification" (2006:231). However, while I use many of the same theoretical tools, my own task in this thesis is rather different. Analysing Soviet cinema in terms of the system of the suture or Althusserian interpellation, for example, requires a different strategy than that used in applying a similar analysis to classical cinema. The Soviet montage films, as will be seen, to some extent *already* subvert the "reality effect" of the system of the suture and reveal the operation of ideology in their own textual enunciation; my analysis is therefore aimed at showing the strategies which the montage filmmakers used to achieve this subversion of the suturing process and to evaluate how successful or unsuccessful those strategies were.

## 1.4 Significance of the research

To some extent, the argument advanced in this thesis can be regarded as being complementary to the work both of Richard Taylor (1998) and of Jeremy Hicks (2007). Taylor has examined several montage films as examples of political propaganda, while Hicks has presented Vertov as a film-maker who pioneered the transformation of newsreel “from the illustration or recording of events into an overt attempt to persuade through images [...] so as to unleash a tremendous rhetorical force” (2007:1). However, whereas Taylor restricts his examination to only three of the films of Soviet montage cinema<sup>1</sup> and does not examine theoretical issues pertaining to the enunciation of those films, I shall examine in some detail both the precise category of propaganda into which the montage directors’ films can be classified and the precise nature of the means by which their films interact with the spectator to generate meaning and communicate ideology. Graham Roberts has also examined non-fiction Soviet cinema in terms of its function as propaganda (Roberts 1999), claiming that his “[a]rtistic and aesthetic evaluations are, unashamedly, made with reference to a film’s messages(s) and its ability to educate or convince an audience” (1999:4). However, while I would wholeheartedly endorse his sentiments, Roberts concentrates only on the functional role of non-fiction film in “the development of (multi- but Russian-centred) national myths” (1999:3) of the USSR, whereas I shall concentrate on the cinematic and rhetorical means by which Soviet montage cinema attempted to achieve its propaganda effects. And whereas Hicks restricts his analysis to the work of Vertov alone, and concentrates on the origins of Vertov’s documentary techniques in the nature of early Soviet journalism, my own work will present a comparative study of the leading montage film-makers – Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Vertov – comparing and contrasting the differing strategies by which they used cinema as a form of political rhetoric. I believe it is important to make such a comparative study, as the Soviet montage “school” was actually a rather diverse group of film-makers who were often in polemical dispute with each other. As Bordwell has said, “A historically complete account of Soviet film montage, then, must include both strands of development; that of Kuleshov and Pudovkin and that of Vertov and Eisenstein” (1972:16). I would add to Bordwell’s statement that Vertov and Eisenstein themselves constituted two rather different “strands” in the development of montage cinema, and that Pudovkin hardly slavishly followed Kuleshov’s ideas. The internal contradictions of the Soviet montage cinema

“school” were more complex than any straightforward binary division.

Furthermore, the reciprocal relationship between propaganda and its audience is usually neglected when Soviet montage cinema is considered as a form of propaganda. In most analyses, propaganda tends to be viewed as a one-way process, as the mere imposition of the propagandist’s views on the propagandee’s passive psyche, as is the case with Kenez (1985) or Taylor (1998), for example, who implicitly portray the Soviet people as passive receptacles for Bolshevik propaganda (Kenez 1985:255). There is a tendency to regard cinema audiences as being particularly passive. As Trotsky rather naively put it in 1923, “The cinema satisfies [...] in a very direct, visual, picturesque and vital way, requiring nothing from the audience” (Taylor and Christie 1988:95). I hope to demonstrate just how mistaken such an attitude actually is, particularly with regard to montage cinema. The link between propaganda and rhetoric as a means of constructing persuasive discourses is also often denied, for example by Bennett and O’Rourke (2006), who contrast “good” rhetoric, which they claim appeals to reason, with “bad” propaganda, which they claim appeals to the emotions. This distinction was simply not recognised by the Soviet montage film-makers, and my own work affirms and investigates this link.

By regarding propaganda as a complex phenomenon with various modalities and strategies rather than taking the restricted and undifferentiated definition usually employed in studies of Soviet cinema, I believe I have been able to gain greater insight into the different and sometimes conflicting modes of propaganda being used by the Soviet montage directors. In particular, I have been able to classify the films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin as transactive, vertical agitation propaganda and the films of Vertov as transactive, horizontal agitation propaganda.

Moreover, I have applied the theory of the system of the suture to Soviet montage cinema in order to provide a new way of understanding the differences (and the similarities) between Soviet montage cinema and classical continuity cinema at the level of enunciation rather than merely in terms of their technical procedures or political content. In particular, analysing the effectivity of the Kuleshov Effect in terms of the system of the suture can reveal new ways of understanding the psychoanalytic basis of the Effect itself, and can perhaps make it more plausible that such an effect does indeed exist (an assumption which has been challenged in recent years, for example by Aumont (1986) and Prince and

Hensley (1992)). It is my contention that, just as the analyst's refusal to suture (Heath 1981:85) can enable the analysand to be "cured", the montage film-makers' refusal to entirely suture the spectator into the filmic text enables them to de-naturalise the ideology embodied in the enunciation of their films and thereby free the spectator from the "trap" of being ideologically interpellated by the suturing process. For the purposes of this thesis, I have adopted the definition of ideology given by Althusser: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (2001:109); by this definition, ideology is analogous to the infant's misrecognition of its own mirror image in the Lacanian mirror stage. Combining an Althusserian definition of ideology with the theory of the system of the suture leads me to conclude that ideology manifests itself in classical style films *and* in montage films (to the extent that they use a suturing process) on the level of the enunciation of the filmic text; that is, in the rhetoric of the film. As Lacan put it, "What is important is the version of the text, and that, Freud tells us, is given in the telling of the dream – that is, in its rhetoric" (1977:57), which echoes Eisenstein's assertion that "[f]orm is *always ideology*. And form always turns out to be *real ideology*. That is, ideology that *really* applies and not what passes for ideology in the idle prattle of the talkers" (Eisenstein 1988:241; original emphasis).

However, I also argue that montage cinema differed from classical cinema, as far as its embodiment of ideology is concerned, in trying to liberate the spectator from Althusserian ideological interpellation by subverting the suturing process by which, according to Oudart and Dayan, classical cinema "traps" the spectator. But when socialist realism was imposed by the Soviet regime as the only permissible method of artistic creation from 1934 onwards, montage cinema was suppressed. Socialist realist cinema then reinstated the process of ideological interpellation by returning to the continuity devices and the suturing processes of classical Hollywood cinema, the "tutor-code of classical cinema", as Dayan has called it. The head of the Soviet cinema industry at the time, Boris Shumyatsky, even had the grandiose ambition of creating a Hollywood-style "Cine-City" on the Black Sea coast (Taylor and Christie 1988:374). Socialist realist cinema therefore became a medium for integration propaganda, like Hollywood, rather than the kind of agitation propaganda which montage cinema had been. As Graham Roberts points out,

this 'enlightening' approach, wherein an art form has to raise the con-



sciousness of the audience rather than succumbing to the lowest common denominator, does not sit well with the urgent exigencies of the Stalinist plan to supercharge the productive powers of the Soviet Union and its citizens overnight. (Roberts 1999:67)

Since it is the “reality effect” generated by the system of the suture which ultimately naturalises the ideology in the enunciation of the filmic text, it follows that the only way to ultimately liberate the spectator from the suturing process is to create “a cinematography not based on the system of representation” (Dayan 1974:28). Dayan denied that such a cinematography exists. However, he did not speculate as to whether there could be a cinematic equivalent of the codes of enunciation of avant-garde painting, particularly abstract painting. Such a cinema could well constitute the non-representational cinematography which Dayan wished for. In my thesis, I investigate whether Soviet montage cinema itself might, at least potentially, have been such a cinematography by using Peircean semiotics to compare it with Malevich’s concept of “non-objective cinema”. One of my conclusions is that Vertov, at least, did indeed go some way towards creating such a non-representational cinematography and could be regarded as being at least as much a Suprematist film-maker as a Constructivist one, which is the status claimed for him by Vlada Petrić (1987).

The ultimate ambition of the montage directors was, I would suggest, far greater than merely providing propaganda support for whatever “general line” the Communist Party happened to espouse at any given moment. They actually aspired to reorganise human consciousness in accordance with the ideological principles of revolutionary Communism, and montage provided them with the rhetorical techniques which could, they hoped, induce that transformation. Eisenstein and Vertov, in particular, though in somewhat different ways, wished to produce revolutionary consciousness on a mass scale. In that respect, film montage was true to its origins as an industrial mass-production technique. The montage directors regarded their own films as not so much works of art as machine tools, part of the means of production for a certain sort of human consciousness. In Jonathan Beller’s words, “Ultimately, the early films [of Eisenstein] are propaganda machines (of a very complex kind) designed to capture the imagination of the masses” (1995:206).

While this process of production required a transactive interaction between the filmic text and the spectator and was ultimately aimed at the political en-

lightenment of the spectator, it was itself largely a coercive process. As Kenez has noted, montage cinema was supportive of an existing authority structure, the Soviet state, and its social functioning was to rally support for that authority structure. Kenez denies montage cinema any status as being “revolutionary” for that reason (2001:48), but in fact I would claim that it actually *was* a revolutionary cinema, albeit not a liberal one. Its liberational aspirations (which certainly existed) were postponed to an indefinite future after the achievement of a peaceful worldwide Communist society. The means used to help achieve that ultimate liberation and freedom were actually (and, they believed, necessarily) coercive and authoritarian. This was, of course, fully in accordance with Marxist ideology. Frederick Engels had frankly asserted as long ago as 1872 that “[a] revolution is the most authoritarian thing there is” (Marx and Engels 1978:733).

André Bazin condemned film montage for its authoritarianism and its alleged coercion of the spectator. It may have been coercive, but it was no more coercive than what Lacan has called “the Real”, and its aim was ultimately to stimulate human consciousness, to awaken the power of human reason, and to force people to think about and to intervene in the world around them; to change the world for the better. After all, as Bertolt Brecht put it, “Propaganda that stimulates thinking, in no matter what field, is useful to the cause of the oppressed” (1966:146).

## 1.5 Thesis outline

Firstly, in chapter 2 I shall establish the historical and cultural context of Soviet montage cinema, and the ways in which that context had a determining influence on its nature as a form of propaganda and political rhetoric.

Chapter 3 will outline some of the most recent theories of propaganda, which will be used to find a definition of propaganda which is appropriate for Soviet montage cinema and which will be adequate to classify the particular modalities of propaganda used by the different montage film-makers.

I shall present a transactive psychoanalytic model of rhetoric (Alcorn 1987) in chapter 4, and then apply it to an analysis of the Kuleshov Effect montage experiment and suggest ways in which this sort of analysis could be extended to the work of other montage film-makers.

In chapter 5, I shall compare montage cinema with both classical and Tsarist

cinema, which itself differed in significant ways from the classical style. I shall then present the theory of the system of the suture (Oudart 1978, Dayan 1974) as it applies to classical cinema as a means of analysing the way in which ideology is embedded in the enunciation of a filmic text.

Chapter 6 will present the application of the theory of the system of the suture to Soviet montage cinema, using the Kuleshov Effect experiment as a test case. This chapter will also examine how and to what extent the montage film-makers subverted the suturing process in their films.

In chapter 7, I shall present Kazimir Malevich's concept of "non-objective cinema", and investigate to what extent this corresponds to Dayan's concept of "a cinematography which is not based on the system of representation" (1974:28). I shall use Peircean semiotics to relate Malevich's Suprematist art to montage cinema in order to investigate how far Soviet montage cinema conformed to Malevich's concept of "non-objective cinema", and the implications this has for the political and ideological functioning of montage cinema.

Finally, chapter 8 will present a summary of my conclusions, and will end with suggestions for some possible avenues for future research.

## Chapter 2

# Soviet Montage Cinema in Context

In order to properly investigate Soviet montage cinema as a form of political rhetoric, it is first necessary to examine its historical and social context, the environment out of which it developed and within which it found its particular function. What Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell wrote about propaganda applies equally well to any form of political rhetoric, of which propaganda is merely the most extreme form:

Propaganda as a process is socially determined. The sociohistorical context provides a heritage that gives a propagandist motivation and even a style of communication. In order to understand how propaganda works, it is necessary to consider how the existing sociohistoric context allows it to work. The propaganda that emerges is the product of forces established long before the activity originated and is controlled by those forces. (1992:264)

Furthermore, film montage must be placed in its context as part of the astonishing ferment of the artistic avant-garde in 1920s Soviet Russia. David Bordwell has pointed out that

[n]o doubt the shortage of raw film stock encouraged the re-editing of old footage; no doubt the study of *Intolerance* contributed to the consciousness of the power of editing. But certain preconditions for the montage style lay in current avant-garde art movements of which Eisenstein and Vertov were part. (1972:16)

As Eisenstein once put it, “All these theories are not the individual creation of myself or Pudovkin or Kuleshov, but the tendency of the time” (Seton 1960:490). This chapter will present the historical and cultural context of Soviet montage

cinema, and will examine the ways in which that context influenced its nature as political rhetoric.

## 2.1 Tsarist cinema

Tsarist film-makers were less advanced technically and aesthetically than their contemporaries elsewhere in Europe. Although Peter Kenez has suggested that “[s]ome works produced in Russia were on as high an artistic level as anywhere in the world” (2001:18), the only examples he gives of Tsarist films on this high artistic level are some of the films of Yevgeni Bauer and Yakov Protazanov, in particular the latter’s *Father Sergius* (1918) (2001:22). However, those films appeared only at the very end of the Tsarist era; *Father Sergius*, for example, was released in early 1918, thereby barely qualifying as a Tsarist film at all. It can therefore be said that Tsarist cinema, compared to its contemporaries in America and elsewhere in Europe, was rather a late developer. Moreover, the October Revolution cut short any further aesthetic and technical progress it might otherwise have made. Indeed, the vocal consignment of almost all Tsarist film-makers to the rubbish heap of history by the leading Soviet montage film-makers<sup>2</sup> is symptomatic of the fact that the influence of Tsarist cinema on Soviet montage cinema was an almost completely negative one – it was what the montage directors were reacting *against* when they formulated their own radical ideas about how films should be made. Tsarist cinema itself has been almost totally overshadowed by the later Soviet cinema, especially montage cinema; as Jay Leyda (1983:11-16) and Ian Christie (Taylor and Christie 1988:xx) have noted, before the recent work of Yuri Tsivian (1990;1998) and other scholars it was relatively neglected.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is vital to have a clear conception of the kind of cinema against which film-makers like Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and especially Dziga Vertov were reacting when they formulated their radical film theories. Soviet montage cinema was not founded in a cultural and political vacuum, but was created in conscious opposition to a kind of film-making, and a kind of film consumption, which once dominated the Russian cinema industry.

Early cinema in Tsarist Russia had a tremendous, almost visceral impact on its audience, which at that time consisted largely of a semi-literate urban proletariat and peasantry who had had little or no contact with modern technology or mass media. Even a sophisticated spectator like Maxim Gorky felt this powerful

effect while watching the Lumière brothers' short film *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* [L'arrivée du train en gare de la Ciotat, 1895] at the Nizhny Novgorod fair in 1896:

Yesterday I was in the Kingdom of Shadows.

If only you knew how strange it is to be there. There are no sounds, no colours. There, everything – the earth, the trees, the people, the water, the air – is tinted in a grey monotone: in a grey sky there are grey rays of sunlight; in grey faces, grey eyes, and the leaves of the trees are grey like ashes. This is not life but the shadow of life and this is not movement but the soundless shadow of movement.

I must explain, lest I be suspected of symbolism or madness. I was at Aumont's café and I was watching the Lumières' cinematograph – moving photographs. The impression it produced was so unusual, so original and complex, that I can hardly convey it in all its nuances, but I can attempt to convey its essence.

[...] Suddenly there is a click, everything vanishes and a railway train appears on the screen. It darts like an arrow straight towards you – watch out! It seems as though it is about to rush into the darkness where you are sitting and reduce you to a mangled sack of skin, full of crumpled flesh and splintered bones, and destroy this hall and this building, so full of wine, women, music and vice, and transform it into fragments and into dust.

But this, too, is merely a train of shadows.<sup>4</sup> (Taylor and Christie 1988:25-26)

Yuri Tsivian has suggested that Gorky's ambivalent response to the Lumière film may have been influenced by the fact that the primary money-making enterprise of Aumont's *café chantant* at the Nizhny Novgorod Fair was prostitution. As Tsivian points out, the way film was received in Russian culture at this time differed somewhat from the way it was received in the country where it was invented. The Lumières' first performances in France were set up as scientific demonstrations, but in Russia the public was introduced to cinema in rather more disreputable circumstances (Tsivian 1998:36).

The cinema was initially used almost exclusively as escapism from the squalor and tedium of everyday life for the urban working class and (when available to them) the peasantry. In fact, the cinema became widely known in those early years as "illusions", a very telling label. In Richard Taylor's words, "The new

cinemas were given names like ‘Illusion’, ‘Marvel’, ‘Mirage’, ‘Fantasia’ and ‘World of Wonders’ and the generic term developed from ‘theatres of living photography’ or ‘electrotheatres’ to the more popular ‘illusions’” (1998:22).<sup>5</sup>

At this stage in its development, the cinema in Russia looked set to become little more than one more “opium of the people” (alongside vodka and the church, in the opinion of the Bolsheviks). This was a period of intense competition between rival Russian film studios, which aimed to appeal mostly to an unsophisticated audience with sensationalist and escapist films in order to maximise quick profits in a financially insecure industry. However, the visceral, non-aestheticised response to these films by a relatively untutored audience was to play an important part in the formation of the Soviet montage directors’ attitudes towards the potential of films to have a powerful effect on the consciousness of an audience, and towards the uses to which cinema could be put.

The popularity of the Tsarist cinema is attested by the fact that by 1913 there were 1,453 cinemas in the Russian Empire: 134 in St Petersburg, 107 in Moscow, 25 in Odessa, 21 in Riga and the rest in small provincial towns (Kenez 2001:11). Moreover, between 1913 and 1916 Tsarist cinemas began to repeat their film programmes five or six times daily rather than only two or three (Taylor 1979:12). The size of cinemas also underwent a gradual expansion during this period: as early as 1908, cinema theatres large enough to hold three hundred people were being constructed (Tsivian 1998:19). In the year 1913, 129 films were produced in the Russian Empire, and by 1916 there were 47 Russian film-producing firms which produced 499 full-length feature films (Taylor 1979:11), and about 1,800 newsreels were released in Russia between 1907 and the First World War (Roberts 1999:11).

However, the ruling class of Tsarist Russia responded rather less enthusiastically to the new entertainment medium. Although the first film ever made in Russia was of Tsar Nicholas II’s coronation in May 1896 (*Coronation of the Tsar* [Couronnement du Czar, 1896]) (Leyda 1983:18-19,405),<sup>6</sup> the Tsarist government was at first indifferent if not downright hostile towards the new medium. As late as 1913, and despite his own private enjoyment of cinema,<sup>7</sup> Nicholas II could write that

I consider cinematography an empty, useless, and even pernicious diversion. Only an abnormal person could place this sideshow business on a level with art. It is all nonsense, and no importance should be lent to such trash. (Qtd.

in Leyda 1983:69).<sup>8</sup>

This is in striking contrast to the Soviet government's attitude just a few years later. By 1922, Lenin was to assert that "of all the arts for us the cinema is the most important" (Taylor and Christie 1988:57). Lenin's statement referred of course to the ideological and agitational uses to which cinema could be put by a newly installed regime seeking to convince the masses of its political and moral legitimacy, rather than to any supposed aesthetic superiority of cinema as an art form. Nevertheless, Nicholas II's dismissal of cinema *tout court* is indicative of the Tsarist regime's general lack of appreciation of the potential of cinema to build support for the regime in the general population, and is symptomatic of its more general failure to understand the need for an ideological justification of its power beyond the mere assertion of the Tsar's so-called divine right to rule the Russian Empire autocratically. As Edward Bernays pointed out in 1928,

Formerly the rulers were the leaders. They laid out the course of history, by the simple process of doing what they wanted. And if nowadays the successors of the rulers, those whose position or ability gives them power, can no longer do what they want without the approval of the masses, they find in propaganda a tool which is increasingly powerful in gaining that approval. (2005:54)

The Tsarist regime never seems to have made that transition, a fact which may have contributed to its downfall. It was only during the First World War that cinema began to be used even half-heartedly as a medium of propaganda by the Tsarist regime, to persuade the Russian people that the enemy was immoral and barbaric and the sacrifices of the war were therefore necessary, and also that the war effort itself was progressing well. In fact, the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 transformed the nature of Tsarist cinema. The economic blockade caused by the Great War led to a collapse in the importation of foreign films and a corresponding (though inadequate) rise of Russian-produced films. Immediately before 1914, about 90% of films shown in Russia were imported from abroad, while by 1916 that figure had fallen to only 20% (Taylor 1979:9,11).

## 2.2 The Great War (1914-18)

In retrospect, the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 can be seen as the beginning of the institutional and artistic transition between Tsarist cinema and Soviet



cinema, a transition which was not really completed until the early 1920s.

As was the case for the whole of Europe, the first serious attempts to use cinema for propaganda purposes in Russia began during the Great War. The pressures of “total war” led to a new relationship between the rulers and the ruled. As Jowett & O’Donnell have noted,

For the first time in history nations were forced to draw on the collective power of their entire populations by linking the individual to a larger societal need. As DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) have pointed out, “It became essential to mobilize sentiments and loyalties, to instill in citizens a hatred and fear of the enemy, to maintain their morale in the face of privation, and to capture their energies into an effective contribution to their nation.” (1992:172)

Modern propaganda – that is, propaganda associated with secular politics rather than religion – therefore originated during the Great War as a response to the need to mobilise the population to meet the unprecedented demands of total war. As early as March 1914, the Skobelev Committee (a charity which had been founded to assist veterans of the Russo-Japanese War)<sup>9</sup> set up a Military Film Section, which was later given the monopoly on filming at the front when the Great War broke out. However, there were press complaints about the sparsity and poor quality of its films, and its unsatisfactory performance led to its monopoly being revoked by the government. The fundamental problem was that the Skobelev Committee was absurdly under-equipped for the task assigned to it: it had only five cameramen to deploy on the entire Eastern Front, and two of them were not even Russian (Roberts 1999:12, Kenez 2001:20). To give the monopoly of filming the entire Eastern Front of the Great War to such a tiny organisation is symptomatic of the suspicion with which the Tsarist authorities regarded any attempt to communicate information or ideas to the masses. The Tsarist system lacked a coherent ideology, and failed to even see the need for one; their deployment of cinema for propaganda purposes was therefore half-hearted and wholly inadequate, in striking contrast to the Bolsheviks’ later exploitation of cinema’s enormous propaganda potential. More effective as propaganda were the Tsarist newsreels supposedly filmed at the front by private producers. However, because of the technical and logistical difficulties of actually filming on the front lines, many of the political propaganda films of the period involved blatant deception of the public; often, the privately produced newsreels were merely pre-

war newsreels with new intertitles added for the occasion (Taylor 1979:12-13). For example, one contemporary journalist complained that “[a]n excerpt from a Pathé newsreel of 1911 showing a forest fire near San Francisco was described here as *Fire in Argonnes*. We come across such deceptions every day” (qtd. in Taylor 1979:13), and Taylor mentions a film called “*The Holy War* [1914] (allegedly a First World War newsreel, but in fact a collection of pre-war film with new and falsified subtitles)” (Taylor 1998:25).<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, this practice of assembling new films from recycled fragments of old films foreshadowed the later use made by Lev Kuleshov of similar cinematic deception in his montage experiments of the early 1920s, in which he would assemble a “fabricated landscape” from widely separated locations around the world to create the illusion of spatial contiguity (Kuleshov 1987:137, Tsivian et al. 1996).<sup>11</sup> The “fabricated landscape” was a montage experiment first proposed by Kuleshov in his 1920 article ‘The Banner of Cinematography’ (Kuleshov 1987:37-55) and actually carried out by his Workshop some time in the early 1920s (1987:137). In Kuleshov’s own words,

it is the possibility of ‘creating’ a nonexistent terrain and the fact that the components of a scene can be shot at any time as long as they are held together by the time of cinematic action. If we split a scene into major elements and start shooting in one part of the city, then continue somewhere else and complete the scene in yet another place, we can get, by splicing the pieces correctly, our own artificial landscape: different locations will come together to provide a single setting on the screen. (Kuleshov 1987:43-44)

What was a crude attempt at deception for propaganda purposes by Tsarist newsreel film-makers would, in Kuleshov’s hands, become a radical new artistic technique. Kuleshov’s innovation involved much more than merely relabelling a one-shot scene of a given location as having been shot at a different location by adding fraudulent intertitles. In his montage experiment, Kuleshov assembled fragments of film which had been shot in widely separated locations, the assemblage being unified by matches on eyeline and matches on action in order to create an imaginary single location in the mind of the spectator. This involved the deconstruction of the unitary space of the single shot and the synthetic creation of an artificial unified space, existing only in the mind of the spectator, by juxtaposing montage fragments. This was far more sophisticated than anything being done by any of the propaganda newsreel film-makers of the Great

War. However, the “fabricated landscape” montage technique could in principle be used for similar purposes as those of the fraudulent propaganda newsreels – to inculcate desirable political beliefs in the mind of the audience by consciously manipulating the way the spectator reads what he or she sees on the screen.

As well as acting as a stimulus for the technical development of film propaganda, one of the most important effects on Russian cinema of the Great War was the pressure it exerted to establish a government monopoly of the cinema industry. In 1916, the Minister of the Interior set up a commission to investigate the possibility of a government film monopoly (Taylor 1979:13-14). The films produced by this proposed government monopoly would be educational and propaganda films aimed at the lower classes in order to instil the “correct” political opinions into their minds. However, no effective action was taken to establish this monopoly before the Revolution of February 1917<sup>12</sup> put an end to the Tsarist regime itself.

## 2.3 Revolution and Civil War (1917-21)

The attempts, feeble though they were, to consciously use cinema as an instrument of political propaganda in Tsarist Russia could be seen as the embryo of the later Soviet government monopoly over cinema (and, indeed, all other art forms) and as the embryo of its explicit policy towards cinema: to make use of these artistic and mass media for propaganda purposes. Such ideas, falling on stony ground in 1916 due to the administrative inadequacies of the Tsarist regime and the distractions of the Great War, were to resurface after October 1917 with renewed vigour, and this time they would be acted upon. Russian cinema was finally nationalised (on paper if not in practice) by the Bolshevik government on 27 August 1919.<sup>13</sup> However, this “nationalisation” was more a statement of intent than an actual, implemented policy, and the Soviet cinema industry was not brought fully under the ownership and control of the Soviet state until the early 1930s. The reasons for this delay include the appallingly poor infrastructure of the Soviet economy, the difficulties encountered in re-equipping the cinema industry after the devastations of the Revolution and Civil War, and the administrative failure to properly co-ordinate the initial attempts at nationalisation.<sup>14</sup>

The initial failure to properly nationalise the cinema industry was at least partly due to the destruction caused by the long and bitter Civil War (1918-21)

which followed the October Revolution. While the Bolshevik Revolution itself was relatively bloodless, the attempted counter-revolution devastated the country, largely destroyed its infrastructure and led to the deaths of millions of people. In particular, the Russian urban proletariat, in whose name the Bolshevik Revolution had taken place, was almost completely destroyed as a class. In Lenin's own words, "The proletariat has become declassed, i.e., dislodged from its class groove and has ceased to exist as a proletariat" (qtd. in Harding 1996:154). The Bolshevik government could therefore not rely on the "natural" class consciousness of the proletariat in their attempt to create a socialist society, but would have to rebuild a socially- and politically-conscious working class themselves using all the means of education and propaganda at their disposal. In this bitter struggle for its very survival, the Bolshevik government therefore found it absolutely essential to engage in an ideological propaganda war against capitalism. Graham Roberts has rightly described how the Bolsheviks "were faced, in Gramsci's terms, with the difficulties of having triumphed in a 'war of position' without a convincing victory in the 'war of manoeuvre'. The citadel had been stormed but the trenches, in which counter-revolution could form, remained intact" (Roberts 1999:15). At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, the only Party Congress in the entire history of the Soviet Union to discuss the issue of propaganda, Preobrazhensky argued that the subjective views of the people do not change as rapidly as the objective social and economic realities (Kenez 1985:125). This meant there was a gap between the readiness of the Bolshevik government, having seized power and "expropriated the expropriators", to lead the people in their task of building socialism and the readiness of the people to actually carry out that task. Political education – propaganda in other words – was therefore essential to create the necessary subjective views in the minds of the people to enable them to carry out the objective tasks required to build socialism. As Peter Kenez has said,

the Bolshevik regime was the first to not merely set itself propaganda goals but also through political education to aim to create a new humanity suitable for living in a new society. No previous state had similar ambitions, and no leaders had paid comparable attention to the issues of persuasion. (1985:4)

The sheer size and the underdevelopment of Russia as a nation made this task both vital and extraordinarily difficult. The extent of this difficulty is suggested by an observation made by Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya in her memoir of a

propaganda tour of the Volga and Kama rivers on the *Red Star* cruiser in 1919. She described how the local Red Army soldiers were unaware even of the existence of the Central Executive Committee more than eighteen months after the October Revolution, and refused to recognise passes issued by it (Taylor 1979:59).<sup>15</sup> Because of the backwardness of Russia at that time, it was paradoxically the most modern of the mass media which therefore proved most useful as a vehicle for propaganda. The fact that cinema was primarily a visual medium meant that it could be used to communicate even with an illiterate population – in Soviet Russia in 1920, 60% of the population could neither read nor write (Kenez 2001:28). Cinema was also an attractive medium for the Bolsheviks because it was a modern technology which provided radically new means of representation and communication, and was therefore experienced by the majority of the Russian people as being in itself a symbol of the power and the promise of industrial modernity. This was something the new, radical, modernising revolutionary government clearly wanted to be associated with.

Before proceeding further, however, an important issue of terminology must be considered. In Russian Marxism, a distinction has traditionally been drawn between “agitation” and “propaganda”, a distinction which does not exist so clearly in English. It was the “father of Russian Marxism”, Georgi Plekhanov, who first drew the distinction. In 1892, he wrote: “A propagandist presents *many* ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents *only one or a few ideas*, but he presents them to a *whole* mass of people” (qtd. in Taylor 1979:27; original emphasis). Lenin refined the distinction in *What is to be Done?*:

the propagandist [...] must present ‘many ideas’, so many indeed that they will be widely understood as an integral whole only by a (comparatively) few persons. The agitator, however, [...] will direct his efforts to presenting *a single idea* to the ‘masses’ [...]; he will strive to *arouse* discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of this contradiction to the propagandist. Consequently the propagandist operates chiefly by means of the *printed* word; the agitator by means of the *spoken* word. (Lenin 1988:132; original emphasis)

In other words, propaganda tends to be rational and abstract, appealing to the minds of its audience, whereas agitation tends to be emotive, making its appeal primarily to the hearts of its audience. Lenin also implied that agitation

is associated with *performance* (for example, making a speech), while he associated propaganda with a more abstract and discursive form of communication. By Plekhanov's and Lenin's definitions, the *agitki* films of the Civil War period were clearly an example of agitation rather than propaganda, as Richard Taylor has pointed out (1979:28); in fact, the distinction between agitation and propaganda seems to have been generally valid during the Civil War – throughout this period the Bolshevik government primarily created agitation rather than propaganda (by their own definition), due to the extreme conditions of the period. However, as social and political conditions stabilised in the Soviet Union during the 1920s, the distinction between agitation and propaganda became increasingly blurred. In Richard Taylor's words, "The elements of agitation and propaganda in a film such as *Bronenosets Potëmkin* (Battleship Potemkin) are inextricably intertwined" (1979:28).<sup>16</sup> Taylor's conclusion that "[i]n a discussion of the Soviet cinema in the 1920s the distinction made between agitation and propaganda is not then on the whole a useful one" (1979:28) therefore became increasingly valid throughout the 1920s. However, Graham Roberts has argued that the distinction between agitation and propaganda in the Russian political tradition had the unfortunate effect of distorting the creative development of Soviet cinema, since it "led to pressures for simplicity and directness which distorted creative development, and quite possibly its effectiveness as a propaganda weapon" (Roberts 1999:15). I find this less than plausible, since the distinction between agitation and propaganda was only maintained with any degree of rigour during the Civil War period, becoming increasingly blurred thereafter and almost meaningless by the time the great Soviet montage films were being made from the mid-1920s onwards. I shall therefore follow Taylor's example and henceforth use the term "propaganda" to refer to both "agitation" and "propaganda" in the Russian Marxist sense.<sup>17</sup>

To return to the development of the nascent Soviet cinema, it can be said that perhaps the most significant effect of the Great War, the two Revolutions of 1917 and the Civil War which followed was the institutional and material collapse of the Tsarist cinema industry. The Soviet government was therefore forced to construct its film industry from almost nothing. After the February Revolution there was an unstoppable haemorrhage of the raw material of the cinema industry – producers and directors fled the political and economic instability of revolutionary Russia, taking props, cameras and precious film stock with them. Following the October

Revolution, the majority of Russian cinema's leading producers, directors and actors were to go into exile, and Soviet cinema was thereby deprived of most of the human and material assets of Tsarist cinema during its crucial early years. Problems had already arisen even before the February Revolution – because the Tsarist film industry had obtained most of its film stock from western Europe (principally France),<sup>18</sup> the blockades and transportation difficulties caused by the outbreak of the Great War had starved the Russian cinema industry of new film stock. The shortages were so severe that there was a sevenfold increase in the price of film stock over five years (Taylor 1979:10-11). The collapse of the Tsarist regime and the Bolsheviks' rise to power induced the remaining film producers and directors to either bury their remaining film stock in the hope that the Bolshevik regime would collapse within a few weeks, or to flee towards the south of Russia with their cameras, props and film stock. Following the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War, most of these Tsarist film-makers and producers fled abroad and the Soviet Union lost their film-making equipment and film stock forever.<sup>19</sup> Tsivian has described the effects of the chronic shortage of film stock on Soviet cinema just after the Civil War:

Writing about the conditions under which films were made in 1919, Aleinikov<sup>20</sup> recalled that before filming began expeditions were sent throughout the country (to Kiev and Odessa in particular) to collect any surviving stocks of unexposed film. What stock they managed to find was usually damaged, covered with a tracery of fine cracks due to poor storage conditions, or 'fogged' due to part exposure. This stock, which earlier would have been condemned as unusable, was used. (1998:107)

This loss of most of the human and material resources of Tsarist cinema was to have profound consequences for the development of Soviet cinema, particularly that part of it which became known as "montage cinema". The absence of older, established film-makers allowed a younger generation, more radical in their politics and more daring and innovative in their technique, to ascend rapidly and to make their mark sooner and more profoundly than might otherwise have been possible. Sergei Yutkevich, an early collaborator with Eisenstein and the co-creator of the concept of the "montage of attractions", spoke of this in an interview in the mid-1960s:

We were incredibly young! We were sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds when we entered upon our artistic lives. The explanation is quite simple: the

Revolution had made way for the young. It has to be remembered that an entire generation had disappeared. Our elders had been dispersed throughout the country, or had perished in the Civil War, or had left Russia. Hence the Republic lacked a clear organization, lacked people; and our way in was easy – the country wanted us to work, the country needed people in every department of culture. (Yutkevitch 1973:13)

Kuleshov himself later summed up in his memoirs the material deprivation as well as the opportunities these young film-makers faced:

I remember one of the film factories abandoned by its owner in the winter, I think, of 1919: amidst the ramshackle buildings remnant pieces of broken furniture stood in the snowbanks, while on top of a table, peeking from underneath a layer of snow was a rusting typewriter with a sheet of paper left in its roller. This is what the “technical basis” of Soviet artistic cinematography amounted to in the days of its establishment! (Kuleshov 1974:206)

This difficult period in Russian history created an institutional and political discontinuity between Tsarist and Soviet cinema, and set Soviet cinema on its separate artistic path. The consequences of this discontinuity for the material conditions of film production in the Soviet Union, and its triggering of a change in the purposes for which cinema was employed, created the ideological and political basis for the theories of the montage directors, who were united in a Marxist interpretation of reality and in their determination to create a consciously political and agitational cinema. It was during this period that the men who were to become the principal Soviet montage directors first emerged as film-makers: Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. In Richard Taylor words, “Their experience at this time did much to shape the theories of the cinema that they developed separately later” (1979:55).

## 2.4 The early careers of the montage film-makers

### Kuleshov

Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov (1899-1970) started his career as a film-maker in the Tsarist cinema industry, working as a set designer for the film director Yevgeni Bauer before becoming a director in his own right. His film *Engineer Prite's*



*Project* (1917), completed when he was just 18 years old, was “the first Russian film made according to the conception of montage”, according to Kuleshov himself (1973:67). Following the October Revolution, he became head of the Newsreel and Re-editing Section of Narkompros (the People’s Commissariat for Education, which was then in charge of the Soviet film industry), where he briefly worked with Dziga Vertov (Kuleshov 1987:211). At about this time, Kuleshov carried out a series of film experiments, with the assistance of Vsevolod Pudovkin, which established the theory and practice of “film montage”. Kuleshov is therefore credited with the actual invention of film montage itself (Schnitzer and Martin 1973:65-76).

The concept of montage is derived from modern industry and refers to the assembly of ready-made elements. The word “montage” itself is derived from the French word *monter* meaning “to mount”, and in modern times refers specifically to the mass production of industrial goods on an assembly line. The word has been applied to certain forms of avant-garde art from about 1910 onwards. Eisenstein himself gave a definition of montage which emphasised its origin in industrial production:

Everyday language borrowed from industry a word denoting the assembling of machinery, pipes, machine tools.

This striking word is “montage” which means assembling, and though it was not yet in vogue, it had every qualification to become fashionable. (Eisenstein 1970:17)

In this respect, the use of montage techniques in art represented a rejection of the “spiritual” or transcendental view of art, popular among the Russian Symbolists of the 1900s and 1910s, in favour of both a materialist view of art as a branch of industrial production and of the proletarianisation of artists themselves.

Kuleshov himself went on to make a series of *agitki* films during the Civil War. His cameraman on these films, Eduard Tisse, would later work as the cameraman for most of Eisenstein’s montage films in the 1920s. After the First State Film School (later to be called VGIK) was founded in Moscow in 1919, Kuleshov joined it and set up his own “Workshop” as an avant-garde alternative to the conservative ideas of the head of the Film School, Vladimir Gardin. After shooting another *agitka* film, *On the Red Front* (1920), the Kuleshov Workshop carried out a further series of montage experiments, including the “films without film”, theatrical performances which mimicked cinematic techniques and effects,

a procedure forced on Kuleshov by the acute shortage of film stock at that time. He also developed a novel approach to film acting based on the concept of the actor as a “actor-model” [*naturshchik*] whose performance could be manipulated by the film director using montage. For three months, Eisenstein studied at the Kuleshov Workshop before going on to make his own first film, the short *Glumov's Diary* (1923). The Workshop itself finally completed its own first major feature film, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, in 1924. The film was a great success, but the Workshop itself disbanded shortly thereafter and Kuleshov continued to work as a film director before ultimately being sidelined after the imposition of socialist realism in the mid-1930s.

Kuleshov placed special emphasis on the construction of a film out of montage fragments and deliberately neglected such things as the composition of particular shots or the manipulation of contrasts within a shot. Each shot, in Kuleshov's view, had to be as simple as possible to serve as a “brick” in the montage construction. As Kuleshov himself said,

we [could not] win on all fronts at once. The war declared by our cinematographic faction was basically a battle for *montage* as the *cornerstone of cinematography*. We proclaimed its priority as compared with separate shots and filmic material, which, we said, were of secondary importance, and therefore, could be studied later. (Kuleshov 1987:135; original emphasis)

Eisenstein, by contrast, from the outset of his career treated the individual shot as itself a complex “montage cell” rather than a simple “brick” and regarded montage as occurring *within* shots as well as *between* shots.<sup>21</sup> Of course, Kuleshov should not be condemned for the relative crudity and bias of his approach. He was, after all, the first Soviet montage film-maker and, in his own words,

It is only natural that the first steps in the study of our craft are characterized by a certain formal bias. There is no call to be afraid of this, let alone protest against it. It is unavoidable in any learner's first ventures. (Kuleshov 1987:60)

## Pudovkin

Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin (1893-1953) completed his university studies after serving in the Great War between 1915 and 1918, and worked in a chemistry

laboratory until 1919. In 1920, he joined Kuleshov's film Workshop which was attached to the State Cinema School and assisted Kuleshov in many of his early film montage experiments. Like Vertov, Pudovkin gained his first experience as a film-maker by making short *agitki* films during the Civil War period, under the tutelage of Vladimir Gardin, the head of the new State Film School, who had been an experienced producer-director in Tsarist cinema. Gardin taught his students the conservative fundamentals of film-making, and Kuleshov actually founded his film Workshop as a radical alternative to the conservatism of the Film School under Gardin's direction. Pudovkin had been invited to join the Kuleshov Workshop as early as 1920, but had chosen to stay with Gardin, collaborating with him to make several *agitka* films. Pudovkin played the part of a Red Army officer in the *agitka* film *In the Days of Struggle* (1920) (directed by Ivan Perestiani) before working as assistant director and playing the lead character in *Hammer and Sickle* (1921) (directed by Gardin). Pudovkin went on to direct part of *Hunger... Hunger... Hunger* (1921), an *agitka* made as part of the relief effort for the devastating famine in the Volga region in 1921. Peter Kenez has noted that "[i]n the most easily measurable terms of money collected, this film was surely one of the most effective propaganda works ever made for foreign consumption" (1985:204). The episode directed by Pudovkin and filmed by Tisse was Pudovkin's first directorial work with non-actors, an aspect of his film-making practice for which he later became famous in the 1920s (Dart 1974:1-2). He then co-wrote another *agitka*, *Locksmith and Chancellor* (1923) (directed by Gardin), before accepting a second invitation to join the Kuleshov Workshop after it returned from making its own *agitki* on the Polish front. This was the beginning of Pudovkin's study of film montage and his break with the conservative Tsarist traditions of film-making he had learned from Gardin; indeed, he even assisted Kuleshov in many of his groundbreaking film montage experiments (Sargeant 2000:4-11). Amy Sargeant has suggested some possible influences of Gardin on Pudovkin's work:

Although Pudovkin tends to underplay the influence of Gardin on his work, *Hammer and Sickle* is notable for the parallel editing in the final reel [...], especially in comparison with the end sequences of *The Mother*; as in the war parade in *The End of St. Petersburg*, the little girl, the mother and the old man return to the village alone; as in *The Mechanics of the Brain*, a mask is used to draw attention to a particular element within a larger

frame. (2000:2)

However, Pudovkin was later to trace the origin of his basic approach to film-making back to Kuleshov rather than to Gardin, who seems to have provided him merely with a solid grounding in the logistics of film-making. Pudovkin acted in Kuleshov's films *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mister West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) and *The Death Ray* (1925), before directing his own first films such as *The Mechanics of the Brain* (1926) and *Chess Fever* (1925).

## Eisenstein

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898-1948), from a middle-class family in Riga<sup>22</sup> and originally trained as an engineer, had volunteered for the Red Army in 1918 and had helped construct fortifications and pontoon bridges during the Civil War before becoming a designer in a Red Army theatre unit at the front. He then worked in the agit-trains, painting posters and drawing cartoons, before leaving the Red Army to finish his engineering studies at the Institute of Civil Engineers in Petrograd. However, in autumn 1920 he dropped out of his engineering course to briefly study Japanese before joining the Central Proletkult Arena and then Vsevolod Meyerhold's Zon Theatre as a designer and eventually a director. During the early 1920s, he worked as a film editor, censoring and altering Western films for the Soviet market. Eisenstein is believed to have assisted Esfir Shub<sup>23</sup> in editing such films as D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* (1922) (Seton 1960:67). In Jay Leyda's words, "The first time Eisenstein ever joined together two pieces of 'real film' was while assisting Esther Schub in the re-editing of Lang's *Dr. Mabuse*" (Leyda 1983:11,n). It is from this assignment that Eisenstein obtained his first detailed exposure to Western films, particularly films constructed according to the new "classical style" of Hollywood. Eisenstein had earlier seen many Tsarist films as a small child in Riga, accompanied by his nurse ("The boy was enchanted by the 'illusions' even though he cried the first time" (Leyda 1983:25,n)), but Tsarist films at that time were not yet made according to the principles of the classical style.

Eisenstein then spent three months studying with Lev Kuleshov in his famous film Workshop before making his first short film, *Glumov's Diary* (1923), as part of his stage production of Alexander Ostrovsky's play *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man*.<sup>24</sup> The centenary of Ostrovsky's birth fell on 12 April 1923,

and Anatoli Lunacharsky, the Commissar who was responsible for the direction of Soviet theatre, had repeatedly used the slogan “Back to Ostrovsky” in his public speeches to theatre workers, urging them to emulate Ostrovsky’s realism and careful craftsmanship. Eisenstein’s adaptation of Ostrovsky’s play *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man* (which he renamed simply *Wiseman*),<sup>25</sup> with its irreverent deconstruction of the plot, its unmotivated discontinuities, its circus tricks and slapstick comedy, in short its “montage of attractions”, was a deliberate provocation against the artistic traditionalism (or “passéism” as the Futurists called it) which Lunacharsky had advocated (Gerould 1974:73).<sup>26</sup> The “montage of attractions” was a new artistic principle which Eisenstein had formulated in collaboration with Sergei Yutkevich; his production of *Wiseman* was his first application of this principle (Eisenstein 1988:33-38). However, it is worth noting that the “cinematic” montage of attractions was anticipated as early as 1899 by none other than Konstantin Stanislavsky, who

was nurturing the idea of a new stage form that he jokingly called the ‘cinematograph’ [sinematograf]. In the vocabulary of the Moscow Art Theatre the word ‘cinematograph’ developed as the designation for a show that presented the audience with a sequence of fragmented excerpts instead of a single action. (Tsivian 1994:9)

The “montage of attractions” can therefore be said to have been originated by Stanislavsky under the influence of cinema on theatre, was developed into a theory of theatrical staging by Eisenstein and Yutkevich, and finally became a new way of making films with Eisenstein’s *Glumov’s Diary*.

The short film *Glumov’s Diary* was intended by Eisenstein to be a parody of Dziga Vertov’s *Kinonedelia* (1918-19) newsreels, and imitates their format of a digest of the previous week’s news by presenting the events of the past seven days as described by Glumov, one of the play’s characters, in his diary. Ironically, Dziga Vertov himself was initially sent to supervise Eisenstein and his film crew; in Eisenstein’s own words,

as at Goskino people thought that I might be too mischievous, so they gave me as a teacher [...] Dziga Vertov!

After the first two or three sequences Vertov left us to our own devices. (Eisenstein 1974:15)

The film was eventually completed with Boris Frantzišson, who also filmed Vertov's *Kinopravda* series of newsreels, as the cameraman. Vertov would hardly have enjoyed the fact that his own newsreels were being parodied, and the theatricality of the production of *Glumov's Diary* was entirely alien to his own ideals. The lifelong mutual dislike and professional rivalry between Eisenstein and Vertov probably originated in this period.<sup>27</sup>

## Vertov

Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) was born into a Jewish family as Denis Abelevich<sup>28</sup> Kaufman in Bialystok, Poland, in 1896.<sup>29</sup> He later chose the name "Dziga Vertov" when he decided to become a film-maker; "Dziga" is probably an onomatopaeic imitation of the sound made by film as it moves through a projector and "Vertov" in Russian suggests rapid movement or a spinning top (Michelson 1984:xviii).<sup>30</sup> It is also possible that Vertov may have been influenced in the choice of his pseudonym by a saying derived from cinema which was popular in Russia in the 1910s: "If the film was going too slowly [the audience] would call out [to the projectionist] 'Turn it, Mickey!' [Mishka, verti!]" (Tsivian 1994:55). Vertov studied music at the Bialystok Conservatory between 1912 and 1915, then studied at the Bekhterev Institute of Psychoneurology in Petrograd between 1914 and 1916.<sup>31</sup> Following the October Revolution, Vertov became the editor of *Kinonedelia*, a weekly newsreel which appeared between June 1918 and July 1919. He produced several other newsreels during the Civil war, filmed the battle of Tsaritsyn,<sup>32</sup> and later produced a compilation film called *History of the Civil War* (1922). In that same year, he founded the Cine-Eye group,<sup>33</sup> led by the "Council of Three": Vertov himself, his brother Mikhail Kaufman and Vertov's wife Elizaveta Svilova.<sup>34</sup> Jeremy Hicks has pointed out that the Cine-Eye group consisted of more than just the "Council of Three", at least after 1925 – from then until its collapse just before *The Man with a Movie Camera* was made, the Cine-Eye group was a broad movement with many members (Hicks 2007:140-41,n.44). According to Vertov's own account,

We began with five observers. By the end of the first part [of *Kino-Eye*] the number had grown to a hundred. 'Circles of the Friends of the *Kinocs*' were formed, and they also developed their activities on a large scale, under the slogan Kino-Eye. (Tsivian 2004:119)

Mikhail Kaufman has described its dissolution after just a few years of existence in the late 1920s:

Two circumstances contributed to the collapse of Kino-Glaz:<sup>35</sup> first of all, the release of *A Sixth of the World*; and the refusal to allow us [to] make *The Man With a Movie Camera*. After that it was impossible for us to get work, so we left for Kiev. Out of the whole Kino-Glaz group only Vertov and I remained. We felt quite confident about the future. (Kaufman 1979:76)

Vertov first put his newly formulated ideas about film montage into practice as the editor of the *Kinopravda* newsreel between 1922 and 1925, excerpts from which he used to compile his first full-length montage film, *Kino-Eye* (1924). Seth Feldman has convincingly demonstrated that Vertov's earlier *Kinonedelia* newsreels did not employ montage techniques to any significant extent, and that it is the later *Kinopravda* newsreels which represent the emergence of Vertov as a montage film-maker. As Feldman puts it,

*Kinonedelia* appears to be edited in a manner that sacrifices cinematic potentials in order to meet the practical needs of the new Soviet regime. There are very few instances of the formal cutting which has received so much attention in discussions of Vertov's later work. (Feldman 1977:8)

And he concludes that "the object of almost all of *Kinonedelia* was to present these themes in the most straightforward manner possible" (1977:47).

These were the principal directors of Soviet montage cinema. They were of course a tiny minority of all the people who entered the nascent Soviet cinema during the early 1920s, most of whom were by no means as innovative or avant-garde as the montage directors themselves. Furthermore, there were some few directors who had been prominent in Tsarist cinema who succeeded in continuing their careers into Soviet times, most notably Vladimir Gardin and Yakov Protazanov. Soviet cinema was by no means dominated either numerically or institutionally by directors who were aesthetically avant-garde or politically committed to the Communist cause – most directors in the Soviet Union, as in the West, were making films intended to entertain and divert the public rather than attempting to transform their political views or their way of perceiving the world.<sup>36</sup> Soviet montage cinema, despite its international artistic prestige from the mid-1920s onwards, was by no means the mainstream of Soviet cinema as a whole. In Richard

Taylor's words, "The entire population most emphatically did not spend the whole of the 1920s in a darkened auditorium watching the films of Eisenstein, Vertov and Pudovkin" (qtd. in Roberts 1999:149).<sup>37</sup>

## 2.5 *Agitki* films and agit-trains

However, during the Civil War period, the mainstream of later Soviet cinema (that is, full-length commercial entertainment films) did not yet exist. Instead, cinema served explicitly political and even military purposes. The newspaper *Izvestia* published an article on February 4, 1919, calling for the privately-owned film studios which remained in Russia to make propaganda films to explain to the soldiers, workers and peasants "(1) what the Red Army is fighting for, (2) what it is fighting against, and (3) how people could aid this combat" (Dart 1974:3). The result was the production of huge numbers of short agitational films about particular topics of political importance – the so-called *agitki* (literally "little agitational pieces"). The term *agitka* (plural *agitki*) was probably derived from the poet Demyan Bedny's satirical agitational poems, which he called "agitki". One of Bedny's *agitka* poems was filmed in autumn 1918, and this may have been the means by which the word entered Soviet cinema to describe a certain type of short agitational film (Leyda 1983:134). From the middle of 1918 to the end of the Civil War in 1921, approximately 60 *agitki* were produced in Soviet Russia (Kenez 2001:33), constituting more than two-thirds of all films made by Soviet film studios from 1918 to 1920 (Taylor 1979:56). The initial shortage of film stock during this period meant that almost no feature-length films were being produced, so throughout the Civil War almost all film production was devoted to creating these shorter newsreels and documentary films and the *agitki*. The *agitki*, usually being only short single-reel films, were cheaper and quicker to produce and were of more immediate political use to the new regime than feature-length fiction films. Whereas 245 feature-length films had been made by Russian studios between February and October 1917, there were only 57 films made in 1919 (Youngblood 1991:appendix 1), of which the majority were *agitki* only one to four reels long. By 1922, only 16 films were made in the Soviet Union, of which seven were short *agitki* (Youngblood 1992:14). As Peter Kenez has described,

The Civil War destroyed the film industry: studios were idle, the distribution system stopped functioning, and the film theatres shut down. Moscow,



for example, had 143 theatres operating before the World War, but in the fall of 1921 not a single one remained in operation. During the worst period in 1921 film showings in Soviet Russia were limited to the exhibition of agitational films (*agitki*) at agitational stations (*agit-punkty*) and to infrequent and haphazard showings of *agitki* at public places in the open air, such as railway stations. (1985:197)

By 1923, there had been a slow recovery:

In early 1923 in Moscow, there were 90 functioning movie theatres, and in Petrograd 49. In Moscow 35 were privately owned, 45 were leased from the government by private entrepreneurs, and the others were operated by governmental organisations. (1985:198)

Denise Youngblood has also noted that “[i]n 1927 there were fewer than 1,500 movie theatres (scarcely more than had existed in Russia in 1913); most were located, moreover, in the largest cities of European Russia” (1992:7). Youngblood has estimated that the total number of projectors in Russia even as late as 1927 was only 4,600, compared to 20-21,000 projectors in the United States at the same time (1992:181,n.14). In the Civil War period, this figure would have been much lower, and the majority of films shown would have been short *agitki*. Once Soviet society had stabilised somewhat, it became clear that short agitational films would hardly attract a paying audience, which is precisely what was needed if the Soviet film industry was to be able to rebuild its infrastructure, increase its output and compete with the flood of imported foreign films which followed the end of the Civil War.<sup>38</sup> The dominance of the *agitki* propaganda films could therefore only be merely a temporary phase of Soviet cinema, arising out of the political and military necessities of Civil War and inevitably withering away as the Civil War itself petered out.

The *agitki* themselves were overtly political films, usually documentaries dealing with topical issues of direct interest to the local population, and were made in a simple style in order to best convey their message to the intended audience of illiterate or semi-literate peasants and urban workers.<sup>39</sup> The first films made after the Revolution by young film-makers like Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Vertov (though not Eisenstein), even if only as editors or actors, were *agitki*. This fact was to have a tremendous impact on their subsequent theorising and practice as montage film-makers. Richard Taylor has expressed this most clearly, and is therefore worth quoting at length:

The *agitka* genre had a decisive influence on the stylistic development of the Soviet film: the essence of economy and dynamism in the visual presentation of material was developed in the principles of editing or, as Eisenstein was later to call it, ‘dynamic montage’. The *agitka* had to convey its message entirely by simple, visual means. It had to attract and hold the attention of its audience and leave them with an impression of dynamism and strength. These principles were embodied in different ways in the theoretical teachings of Lev Kuleshov and his Workshop at the Film School, in the documentaries and manifestos of Dziga Vertov’s Kinoglaz (Cine-Eye) group, in the films of Shub, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and others. (1979:56)

Indeed, although Eisenstein himself did not make any *agitki* during the Civil War, there are strong echoes of the *agitka* style in several of Eisenstein’s classic films of the late 1920s – in *October* (1928), for example, Eisenstein interpolates a sequence in which a rifle is disassembled and re-assembled in stop-motion animation. This sequence fulfils the same political and agitational function as one of the early *agitki*: to demonstrate to the audience how to field-strip a rifle, in order to enable them to be better revolutionary fighters for the Communist cause.

The *agitki* were not merely a passive depiction or record of the Revolution; they were an active part of the Revolution itself, helping to agitate and mobilise the working class audience. And the cameramen and film-makers in the front lines of the Civil War were no longer the detached “artists” or profit-seeking opportunists who had predominated in Tsarist cinema, but were passionately committed to the political and military struggle. For them, the *agitki* – short, documentary propaganda films – were the ideal medium for what they wished to achieve with cinema. Vladimir Nilsen wrote of the idealism of the cameramen attached to the Red Army during the Civil War:

Certain cameramen were transferred from story-film cinematography to newsreel work, and became permanent travelling companions of Red Army detachments. [...] Already he was far from the neutral position of the bourgeois newsreel reporter who seeks sensational shots amid the circumstances of a fighting front. He became an active agitator and propagandist, frequently changing his camera for a rifle. In these harsh circumstances of the civil war he was subjected to an ideological transformation, for he recognized the importance of this rôle as a Soviet newsreel reporter, and distinctly understood his social obligations to millions of workers who thirsted to see on the screen genuine cinema documents of day-to-day events. In

the process of this continuous active work a new type of cameraman was created, completely unlike the “artists of photography” of the days of Pathé and Khanzhonkov [...]. (Qtd. in Leyda 1983:137)

Despite being an artist and theatre designer rather than a film-maker during the Civil War, Eisenstein never entirely lost sight of this function of his film-making throughout the 1920s: to agitate and propagandise the population as part of the historic struggle between capital and labour. However, it must be said that the montage director whose later work was closest to the style of the *agitki* was Dziga Vertov. As Peter Kenez has noted, “in artistic conception, length and style, [the *agitki*] were closely related to the newsreels. The main difference was that in the *agitki* actors (not always professional ones) assumed roles” (2001:41). His work on the Civil War *agitki* may have served to confirm Vertov in his exclusive allegiance to documentary film-making. And while the documentary and newsreel form taken by the *agitki* may have appealed to Vertov, it was the use of non-professional actors which probably had the greatest influence on Pudovkin’s later film-making practice. Kenez’s claim that “[i]t is fair to say that Soviet cinema grew out of its first original product, the *agitka*” (2001:44) correctly emphasises the decisive, formative influence of the propagandistic *agitki* films on Soviet cinema as a whole and on montage cinema in particular.<sup>40</sup>

These so-called *agitki* were usually distributed and projected to rural audiences using the “agit-trains”, which served as mobile centres of propaganda and political agitation and which played a vital role in shoring up popular support for the Bolshevik regime during the desperate struggle of the Civil War. These founders of Soviet montage cinema – Kuleshov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov – all spent time during the Civil War working as film-makers, editors and actors on the agit-trains, though Eisenstein worked as an artist rather than a film-maker on his agit-train. The agit-trains can in fact be regarded as having provided a crude prototype for Dziga Vertov’s concept of a nationwide network of *kinoki*. Vertov’s aim was to create

a permanent establishment of contributors, on-the-spot correspondents, *and the means to maintain them and move them about*, an adequate supply of film stock, and the opportunity for practical links with foreign countries. (Taylor and Christie 1988:84; my emphasis)<sup>41</sup>

The footage filmed by these *kinoki* would be returned to Moscow to be edited by Vertov, just as the footage filmed on the agit-trains during the Civil War was

edited by Vertov in Moscow and then sent back out on the same agit-trains to be exhibited across the Soviet Union (Leyda 1983:138). As Feldman has noted,

Vertov's experiences on the agit-train and agit-steamboat convinced him of the importance of mobile projection techniques in the dissemination of newsreels and other films meant as social and agitational works. (1977:49)

The agit-trains therefore have such a pivotal importance in the development of Soviet montage cinema that it is worth examining them in some detail.

In Taylor's words,

The concept of the agit-train was a logical historical development, mixing the artistic tradition of the strolling player (*gastrolër*) and his later counterpart in the early history of the cinema with some of the most modern technological capabilities. (1979:52)

The first agit-train, named after Lenin, had its trial run from Moscow to Kazan on 13 August 1918. It had no cinema component, but the success of the trial run led to the next generation of agit-trains, almost all of which were equipped with a film department. While the first agit-train had no separate cinema component, there was actually a film-crew on board headed by Eduard Tisse, who later became famous as the cameraman who filmed most of Eisenstein's classic montage films of the 1920s. Tisse sent his footage back to Moscow, where it was edited by Vertov. Later agit-trains had their own film laboratories and cutting-rooms on board so that films could be shot, developed, edited and exhibited entirely on the train itself (Leyda 1983:132). Taylor has described this second generation of agit-trains:

these were composed of sixteen to eighteen coaches and each train had an internal telephone link and a radio transmitter-receiver for communication with their home base in Moscow. From fifteen to eighteen political workers were employed and in addition there were on average between eighty and eight-five technical assistants. [...] The trains were distinctively and brightly decorated with paintings and slogans; artists of the standing of Mayakovsky and El Lissitsky were involved, together with many others who, as a result of their Civil War experiences, later went into the cinema. Eisenstein and Kozintsev were amongst the latter. [...] Inside, the trains were divided into different working compartments. [...] In addition most trains had a film department, a book store, a shop and a space for exhibitions on various themes. (1979:54-55)

When the first agit-train was refitted in Moscow and sent out on its second run, this time to the Western Front for three months, it carried the film which Dziga Vertov had edited from Eduard Tisse's footage shot during the agit-train's first trial run, *The October Revolution* (1919), to be exhibited to the civilian population on its route. In the first month of its three-month tour, the staff gave seventeen screenings for the local population, and twenty-eight special screenings for children (Leyda 1983:138). Huntly Carter described the mode of operation of this agit-train in a book published in 1924:

From this "Red Train" of Propaganda over 20,000 pamphlets and books were sold for ready cash in the first seven days, and 60,000 educational books were distributed freely to various local Soviets. The weekly sale of *Izvestia*, also carried on this train, increased during the same period by 10,000 copies. Twelve mass meetings were held at various stopping places. Traveling with the train were cinematograph operators taking films, and painters making sketches of the life of each town visited. The films and sketches were exchanged in order to acquaint the people of the various districts with each other's mode of life, habits, and dress. (Qtd. in Leyda 1983:138)

The agit-trains proved to be highly successful as propaganda weapons during the Civil War and their use continued into the 1920s and even the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> However, as the Soviet government consolidated itself in power, the agit-trains became less important and were eventually phased out in favour of fixed propaganda centres known as "agitpunkti".<sup>43</sup> Following a decree of 13 May, 1919, 140 agitpunkti were constructed, and a further 220 were established in 1920 (Taylor 1979:52).

## 2.6 Vertov's *kinoki* network

There was a two-way traffic of film material in the agit-trains: completed *agitki* films were taken from Moscow to be exhibited to the target audience in the provinces, and newly-shot footage – mostly newsreel and documentary material – was returned back to Moscow to be edited. This two-way process is remarkably similar to Dziga Vertov's later proposals for a network of *kinoki*, cinema "worker-correspondents" who would go out across the Soviet Union and shoot film footage of the reality of Soviet society, the footage then being sent back to be edited into

documentary films which would be sent out to be exhibited across the Soviet Union. Vertov's ambition was to

create an army of cine-observers and cine-correspondents with the aim of moving away from the authorship of a single person to mass authorship, with the aim of organising a montage vision – not an accidental but a necessary and sufficient overview of the world every few hours. (Qtd. in Hicks 2007:17-18)

This ambition would require a network of transportation and living accommodation for the *kinoki* of which the agit-trains could be seen as a prototype:

*Cine-Pravda* needs and does not have: a permanent establishment of contributors, on-the-spot correspondents, and the means to maintain them and move them about, an adequate supply of film stock, and the opportunity for practical links with foreign countries. (Taylor and Christie 1988:84)

The absence of such facilities after the end of the Civil War was felt by Vertov to be the main stumbling block to the existence of the kind of newsreel he felt that a socialist society needed, and was the central motivation behind his creation of the Cine-Eye movement itself (Hicks 2007:16). As Hicks puts it,

Such a movement would transform newsreel and society, democratise technology and enact the slogans 'The world through the eyes of the millions' and 'The transfer of authorship to the people'. [...] Vertov's aspirations for the movement encompass the democratisation not just of technology but also of creativity, through a transcending of the distinction between art and work. (2007:18)

This is a fundamentally Marxist vision, inspired by the ambition to erase the distinction between manual and mental labour. In Vertov's words, "there is no distinction between artistic and non-artistic labour" (qtd. in Hicks 2007:18). It is therefore very likely that it was his experiences during the Civil War shooting and editing the short *agitki* films, and experiencing the unusual mode of production and distribution of the *agitki* – so utterly unlike that of Tsarist cinema, or any other cinema of the period for that matter – which provided Vertov with the institutional model for his later proposals for a network of *kinoki*, his "cinema worker-correspondents", to provide an alternative to the institutional framework of commercial cinema. As Vertov asserted, "Existing cinema, as a commercial affair, like cinema as a sphere of art, has nothing in common with our work"

(Vertov 1984:74). The fact that Vertov, unlike Kuleshov, had no experience of working in cinema during Tsarist times may help to account for his far more radical rejection of the institutional framework of production and distribution characteristic of commercial cinema. Vertov described his plans in 1925:

In the area of vision: the facts culled by the kinok-observers or cinema worker-correspondents (please do not confuse them with cinema worker-correspondents assigned to reviewing) are organized by film editors according to party instructions, distributed in the maximum possible numbers of prints and shown everywhere. (1984:49)

The ultimate aim of this group of *kinoki* was to be the establishment of a network of communication links between all the dispersed individual members of the working class, not only in the Soviet Union but across the entire world: “our cherished basic goal – to unite all the workers scattered over the earth through a single consciousness, a single bond, a single collective will in the battle for communism” (1984:49). Modern industrial society involves a complex web of economic interaction and interdependency which, according to Marxist theory, is usually obscured by the reifying institutions of capitalism. This obscuring of reality gives rise to the “false consciousness” of bourgeois individualism in a society in which the individual is actually completely dependent on the labour of others. Vertov believed that the radical Futurist aesthetics of the “kino-eye”, *together with a radically new mode of film production and distribution*, could reveal that hidden reality to the workers:

The textile worker ought to see the worker in a factory making a machine essential to a textile worker. The worker at the machine tool plant ought to see the miner who gives his factory its essential fuel, coal. The coal miner ought to see the peasant who produces the bread essential to him. (1984:52)

In short, “Workers ought to see one another so that a close, indissoluble bond can be established among them” (1984:52).

Vertov's use of the name “cinema worker-correspondent” to describe the *kinoki* is very significant. It deliberately echoed the phrase used to describe the contributors to the “wall newspapers” (*stengazeti*) which sprouted everywhere in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution: the “worker-correspondent” (*rabkor*). Wall newspapers, which have existed since at least the time of ancient Rome,<sup>44</sup> became

enormously popular in Russia after the October Revolution, and were regarded by the Bolsheviks as an important propaganda medium. Workers and schoolchildren were encouraged to paste news clippings, documentary photographs and commentaries, cartoons and jokes on a wall set aside for the purpose. Wall newspapers could be found on the streets, in factories, schools and hospitals, in fact in almost any public space in the Soviet Union. They were written by a new kind of journalist, the “worker-correspondent”, who would ideally bridge the dichotomy between writer and reader; any worker could contribute to a wall newspaper and become a *rabkor*. The wall newspaper was regarded not merely as a medium for the communication of ideas, but as a way of transforming the consciousness both of its readers and of its writers. Vertov's film *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) contains a long sequence in which a wall newspaper assembles itself in stop-motion animation; Vertov was thereby making a visual connection between his own activity as a film-maker and the wall newspapers. The *kinoki* (Vertov's neologism for the “cinema worker-correspondents”)<sup>45</sup> are, Vertov is implying, the “rabkors” of cinema, and the Cine-Eye group has the same propaganda role as the wall newspapers and the same aspiration to transform the political and social consciousness of the masses. The decentralised and populist institutional framework of the wall newspapers, together with the example of the *agitki* propaganda films, was to be the model for the nationwide (and ultimately, Vertov hoped, worldwide) network of *kinoki*, the *cinema* worker-correspondents.<sup>46</sup> In his ‘Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups’, Vertov wrote:

A bulletin-board newspaper [i.e. a wall newspaper] is issued monthly or every two weeks and uses photographs to illustrate the life of a factory, plant, or village; it participates in campaigns, reveals surrounding life as fully as possible, agitates, propagandizes, and organizes. (Vertov 1984:70)

The Bolsheviks regarded the wall newspaper as such an important propaganda medium that they subjected it to quite close supervision. Whereas the ideal was that the wall newspapers represented the “spontaneous” agitational organisation of the worker-correspondents, in Kenez's words they were actually “the most extraordinary examples of organized ‘spontaneity’” (1985:238). The “reading rooms” [*izba chital'nia*] which the Bolsheviks set up in most provincial towns each had their own wall newspaper. The journal devoted to the reading rooms, *Izba chital'nia*, gave detailed instructions in 1924 to the directors of the reading rooms as to precisely how their wall newspapers should be edited:



Every issue had to have an 'editorial' about an important current event in 40-60 lines; short news articles from abroad, each no more than 3-5 lines, for a total of 30 lines; 15-20 lines devoted to Party news; 30-40 lines on the work of the local soviet; 20-30 lines on Komsomol work; and 30-40 lines on the economy and also on the work of the cooperative. The wall newspaper had to contain caricatures, poems, and, very importantly, letters from readers. (Kenez 1985:139)

While Vertov laid out approximate guidelines for his *kinoki* to follow (Vertov 1984:67-79), and the films they produced were to be edited at a central location<sup>47</sup> rather than by the *kinoki* themselves, he at no point imposed such detailed supervision upon the *kinoki* as the Soviet government imposed upon the wall newspaper. It seems he wanted the Cine-Eye Group to consist of genuinely spontaneous agitators, as his rejection of the use of scenarios in the work of the *kinoki* indicates (1984:72-75).

The extreme conditions of the Russian Civil War had led to a collapse of the commercial institutional framework of cinema production and distribution which had been built up in Tsarist times.<sup>48</sup> Vertov hoped to transform this temporary breakdown into a permanent one. However, the collapse of the institutional framework of commercial cinema and its replacement with a radical and politicised alternative occurred out of political and economic necessity rather than as a spontaneous avant-garde experiment. As social and economic conditions improved after 1921, the traditional institutional framework of commercial cinema was gradually re-established, much to Vertov's vocally expressed disappointment. For example, on January 20, 1923, the "Council of Three" issued a somewhat desperate 'Appeal to Cinematographers':

Five seething years of universal daring have passed through you and gone, leaving no trace. You keep pre-revolutionary 'artistic' models hanging like ikons within you, and it is to them alone that your inner piety has been directed. [...] The Council of Three observes with unconcealed regret film production workers leafing through literary texts in search of suitable dramatizations. (1984:13)

By this time, however, Vertov and his Cine-Eye group were fighting a losing battle: the "played" cinema had returned to Soviet cinema screens, this time to stay.

## 2.7 *Intolerance* in the Soviet Union

The impact on Soviet montage cinema of D. W. Griffith's films was not merely or even primarily aesthetic or technical; as Tsivian has pointed out, "crosscutting was only a part of a larger story of Griffith's reception in Russia" (1997:51). A very significant aspect of his impact on the Soviet montage directors was his demonstration that cinema could be used to produce powerful political and even intellectual effects on a mass audience. As Richard J. Meyer put it, "The major contribution of [*The Birth of a Nation*] was [...] its demonstration to the world that film was the greatest medium for propaganda yet devised" (qtd. in Geduld 1971:116). This *political* aspect of Griffith's films was central to the montage directors' reception of them, even though the particular form which Griffith's politics took was essentially incompatible with Marxism-Leninism.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, when Griffith's epic film *Intolerance* was exhibited in the Soviet Union in 1919, it had an electrifying effect, not just on the emergent montage directors themselves, but on the entire Soviet film industry. This was despite the fact that Griffith's films were not shown in the Soviet Union in exactly the same form in which they were shown in the West but were re-edited for ideological and political reasons (*Intolerance*, for example, had its intertitles edited and the Christian epilogue was removed entirely).<sup>50</sup> Lenin himself was so impressed by *Intolerance* that he reputedly asked Griffith to become the head of the Soviet film industry (Drew 1986:139). This was not because he admired Griffith's use of parallel editing; rather, Lenin recognised Griffith's brilliant use of cinema for political agitation and wished to enlist his expertise to help the Soviet cinema industry achieve the same effect. One of Lenin's emissaries even told Griffith that *Intolerance* "was a powerful influence [...] in cementing the feeling for the new government" and that "you – unknown to yourself – were one of our biggest agents" (qtd. in Drew 1986:138). While *Intolerance* had its greatest success in Soviet Russia, where it ran for ten years, it also received tremendous critical acclaim across the world and helped to establish cinema as a mass medium capable of directing thought rather than being merely a vulgar form of mass entertainment. For example, David Lloyd George, the British prime Minister, said of Griffith that "he had the greatest power in his hands for the control of men's minds that the world has ever seen" and that "it was only a question of time when governments would recognize this and subsidize pictures that would help them nationally and internationally" (qtd. in Drew 1986:136), thereby anticipating

Lenin's pronouncement that "of all the arts, for us the most important is cinema". In fact, it was to be the British rather than the Soviets who made the first direct use of Griffith's talents as a propagandist, by importing him into Britain during the Great War to direct *Hearts of the World* (1918), an anti-German film intended to strengthen the wartime alliance between Britain and America, filmed against authentic backgrounds on the Western Front (Jowett and O'Donnell 1992:92).

The lesson that Griffith had taught concerning the propagandistic power of cinema was also not lost on the Soviet montage directors themselves; Eisenstein later proclaimed that "all that is best in the Soviet cinema has its origins in *Intolerance*" (Barna 1973:74) and he paid tribute to Griffith by saying that

I wish to recall what David Wark Griffith himself represented to us, the young Soviet film-makers of the 'twenties.

To say it simply and without equivocation: a revelation (Eisenstein 1977:201).

It was seeing *Intolerance* for the first time which inspired Pudovkin to abandon the study of chemistry and become a film director. Until seeing Griffith's film, Pudovkin had despised cinema as an art form (Dart 1974:2). The caption of his high school yearbook photograph even read, "This sixth year student at the Moscow gymnasium loved music and very much liked to draw. He wasn't interested in cinematography – he had absolutely no liking for it" (1974:209). He later described how

[a]bout that time [1920] I happened to see Griffith's great film, *Intolerance*. In that wonderful work I saw for the first time the possibilities of the epic picture. Yes, Griffith was really my teacher. Later on I saw *Broken Blossoms*, and I fell more and more under the spell of Griffith. My first three pictures, therefore, were really influenced by this great American director. (Qtd. in Drew 1986:139-40)

Even Lev Kuleshov, the founder of Soviet film montage, acknowledged the seminal influence of Griffith when he wrote, "Two universally recognized masters created the school of cinematography; they are David Wark Griffith and Charles Chaplin" (Kuleshov 1987:165).

In fact, it was only Vertov alone of the montage directors who never publically acknowledged Griffith as an influence. Vertov actually asserted that *Kino-Eye* (1924) was the first "film-thing", which "does not satisfy any of the demands made of a fiction film. It is made as if the studios, the directors, Griffith, Los Angeles,

had never existed” (Tsivian 2004:119). This refusal to acknowledge Griffith was almost certainly a result of Griffith’s status as a maker of sentimental, fictional films; even if his pioneering use of parallel editing and the rhetorical power of his films did impress Vertov, he could never acknowledge it without undermining his own position as a polemical enemy of fictional, “played” film. Whatever the reason may have been, in Tsivian’s words, “An *enfant terrible* in the family of great Russian film-makers, Dziga Vertov alone had no word of thanks for Griffith” (1997:63). This is not entirely true, however: Vertov grudgingly acknowledged the fact that, while he was independently developing his own rapid montage style in *The Battle of Tsaritsyn* (1920), Griffith’s film indirectly helped to prepare the ground for the reception of Vertov’s own films. As Vertov himself said, “After a short time there came Griffith’s film *Intolerance*. After that it was easier to speak” (qtd. in Kepley 1979:23). However, Vertov’s brother Mikhail Kaufman was perhaps more candid than Vertov himself when he asserted the importance of Griffith’s *Intolerance* in an interview published in the journal *October* in 1979:

*Kaufman*: Kuleshov’s experiments in editing? But they didn’t excite us. To be quite honest, it was the editing of *Intolerance* that influenced us.

*October*: Directly? Griffith?

*Kaufman*: Yes, Griffith.

*October*: Through Kuleshov?

*Kaufman*: No, *Griffith*. (Kaufman 1979:63; original emphasis)

The other montage directors did not hesitate to openly acknowledge that they learned much from Griffith’s film-making techniques, such as his crowd scenes or his presentation of character through a crude form of associational montage. Sergei Yutkevich, in his essay ‘D. W. Griffith and His Actors’, even claimed Griffith to be the inventor of “type casting”, a crude precursor of Eisensteinian “typage”, and Kuleshov pointed to Griffith as a common denominator linking his films to those of Eisenstein in their handling of crowd scenes:

The most interesting thing about *The Death Ray*<sup>51</sup> is its crowd scenes. They have been compared to those in *Strike*. That is understandable. We had researched crowd scenes together with Eisenstein in the Kuleshov Workshop, using Griffith’s *Intolerance* as our model. (Kuleshov 1987:227)

Eisenstein himself admired Griffith’s “cinematic” method of presenting characters:

The Americans use this technique brilliantly for characterisation – I remember the way Griffith ‘introduced’ the ‘Musketeer’, the gang-leader in *Intolerance*: he showed us a wall of his room completely covered with naked women and then showed the man himself. How much more powerful and cinematic this is, we submit, than the introduction of the workhouse supervisor in *Oliver Twist* in a scene where he pushed two cripples around: i.e., he is shown through his deeds (a purely theatrical method of sketching character through action) and not through provoking the necessary associations. (Eisenstein 1988:42)

As Tsivian points out, “This, claimed Eisenstein, is how ‘film attractions’ work: by way of stimulating a chain of emotional responses (‘reflexes’) in order to project them on a character or event” (1997:53). Eisenstein, however, took this technique much further than Griffith ever did, developing it into his theory of associational montage.

But perhaps the most innovative film-making technique for which Griffith became famous was “parallel editing”. This technique – usually used in the chase scenes with which his films often ended – involved cross-cutting between two actions occurring at the same time but in separate locations. If this had been as far as Griffith had taken the method, as is often claimed, then it would hardly qualify as a significant precursor to montage as it was later developed by the Soviet directors. However, Griffith’s use of parallel editing was actually more subtle than he is often given credit for. His earliest experiments in parallel editing and cross-cutting had been confined to using the technique to create suspense or to unfold the narrative. However, from his one-reel Biograph film *A Corner in Wheat* (1909) onwards, Griffith started using parallel editing to dramatise abstract ideas. In that short film, by repeatedly cutting between the banquet of a wealthy wheat speculator and the breadlines of the starving who are the victims of his market manipulation, Griffith developed his technique of parallel editing to express an ideological conception of society – to direct the thinking of his audience. As Robert Henderson has put it, *A Corner in Wheat* shows “a firm and obvious rhythm [...] based on the ideological content of each shot” (1970). This, superficially at least, seems not very far from the “intellectual montage” of Eisenstein, or the montage of Pudovkin’s early films, as Eileen Bowser has noted (1976:42). Indeed, the genealogy of the sequence in Pudovkin’s *The End of St Petersburg* (1927) in which he crosscuts between scenes of frenzied speculators at the stock market and the horrors of the trench warfare from which they are

profiting can be traced almost directly from Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat*. And, as William Drew has said,

In succeeding films, Griffith continued to experiment with this technique. It reached its apogee with his "drama of comparisons" [*Intolerance*] in which he not only cut between the oppressors and the oppressed within the individual stories but used thematic cross-cutting between the four stories to reinforce the unity of his historical vision. (1986:99-100)

Through his use of cross-cutting between causally unrelated narratives in order to project a common theme running between them, Griffith was using parallel editing – a primitive form of film montage – to achieve ideological and rhetorical effects on the audience. And in fact, it was the rhetorical power of this technique which most impressed the Soviet montage directors when they saw *Intolerance* for the first time, rather than any sense of aesthetic pleasure. Despite the dubious nature of Griffith's ideology from a Marxist perspective, the fact that Griffith had found a way – however crude and untheorised – to convey that ideology into the minds of his audience so powerfully and so effectively is ultimately what made Griffith such a seminal influence on Soviet montage cinema. His use of a consistent social-historical vision to unify causally unrelated shots into a thematically linked whole had a particular influence on Pudovkin, whose first three films in particular owe a great debt to Griffith, as he himself readily acknowledged (Drew 1986:140).

However, it is important not to overstate the extent to which Griffith had anticipated the creation of film montage. Eisenstein was later to describe what he saw as some of the deficiencies of Griffith's "montage":

People still speak of 'American montage'. I am afraid that the time has come to add this 'Americanism' to the others so ruthlessly debunked by Comrade Osinsky.

America has not understood montage as a new element, a new opportunity. America is honestly narrative; *it does not 'parade' the figurative character of its montage but shows honestly what is happening.*

The rapid montage that stuns us is not a construction but *a forced portrayal, as frequent as possible, of the pursuer and the pursued.* The spacing out of the dialogue in close-ups is necessary to show one after another the facial expressions of the 'public's favourites'. Without regard for the perspectives of montage possibilities. (Eisenstein 1988:81; original emphasis)

Eisenstein, who was unfamiliar with Griffith's Biograph films, was perhaps being somewhat unfair to Griffith by implying that he only used rapid montage and cross-cutting for chase scenes. Based on his viewing of about 100 of Griffith's early Biograph one- and two-reelers, William Johnson has suggested that "[o]ne of Griffith's most distinctive editing devices is a single direct cut between physically distant scenes in order to stress their contrast or similarity" and that "[s]uch varied contrasts play as large a part in Griffith's editing repertoire as the more notorious cross-cutting which leads to a last-minute rescue" (1976:4). He concludes that "Griffith's use of the last-minute rescue came from one predilection among several rather than from a dominant obsession" (1976:4). Charlie Keil has also noted that "the Griffith formula for the last-minute rescue was subject to modification more often than is indicated in standard accounts" (1989:31), or indeed in Eisenstein's account.

However, Eisenstein was correct to point out that Griffith failed to make the crucial transition from using montage elements to represent events and actions to using them to achieve genuinely abstract "montage tropes" – what Eisenstein called the "figurative character of montage" – despite coming close in such works as *A Corner in Wheat*. Without this abstraction, montage as a metaphoric and associational filmic discourse is impossible, and cannot be developed beyond being merely a method of building tempo and emotional pitch. In Eisenstein's words,

Our conception of montage has far outgrown the classic dualistic montage esthetic of Griffith, symbolized by the two never-convergent parallel racers, interweaving the thematically variegated strips with a view towards the mutual intensification of entertainment, tension and tempi.

For us montage became a means of achieving *a unity of a higher order* – a means *through the montage image of achieving an organic embodiment of a single idea conception, embracing all elements, parts, details of the film-work*. (Eisenstein 1977:254; original emphasis)

And Eisenstein passed a rather dismissive judgement on Griffith during one of his lessons at the State Cinema Institute when he said that

[i]t is noteworthy that Griffith, first to put into practice, twenty years ago, parallel and cross-cutting, could take its possibilities no further. For him there existed only the plot cross-cutting of the action, he did not realise that such parallel presentation of action contained further possibilities. (Qtd. in Nizhny 1979:83)

The aesthetic influence of *Intolerance* on Soviet montage cinema is therefore by no means as overwhelming or as straightforward as it is often presented.<sup>52</sup> As Vance Kepley has asserted, “more balanced studies argue that *Intolerance* was actually one of several sources for the Soviets and that the Soviet montage aesthetic originated in Russian and avant-garde art, theater and literature” (1979:22). So far as montage cinema is considered purely as an *aesthetic*, Kepley is undoubtedly correct; however, if we consider it as a form of *rhetoric*, then Griffith – especially through his epic *Intolerance* – can be said to have had a decisive impact on the Soviet montage directors as rhetoricians and propagandists. Only Vertov could be said to be an exception to this; but as he himself admitted, his own polemical tasks in advancing the cause of montage as a vehicle for political rhetoric became easier after Griffith’s films became more widely known among Soviet audiences (1979:23).

Griffith claimed in 1926 that

as long ago as 1910, I was carrying on a series of experiments in film tempo: making one picture at normal pace, the next with underpacing, and the reactions of many audiences were carefully recorded. (Qtd. in Jesionowski 1987:138)

The parallel with the montage experiments carried out by Kuleshov about a decade later is remarkable. Both Griffith and Kuleshov were especially concerned with the audience: they both wanted to manipulate the reactions of the audience using cinematic technique, the best techniques being those which gave the most control over the emotional state of the spectator. It is therefore important not to overstate the extent to which Griffith was a “merely intuitive” film-maker. However, Griffith’s experiments seem to have been far cruder than Kuleshov’s and their results seem to have been used as rules of thumb for his film-making practice rather than as the basis of any theoretical formulation, and it remains broadly true that Griffith was an essentially (though not entirely) intuitive artist who never consciously formulated his film-making practice into abstract or universal principles. Moreover, he drew back from fully developing a form of intellectual montage, due to his apparent mistrust of abstract thought. Griffith was strongly influenced by the trend towards primitivism in American culture at that time, which stressed a faith in instinct and emotion rather than abstract thought. In fact, as Drew puts it, “It was through Griffith, intuitively incorporating the more compressed style of the modern novel, that ‘primitivism’ became the characteris-



tic mode of expression in the cinema” (1986:101). The intellectual and ideological power of Griffith’s innovative editing techniques was therefore fatally undermined from the outset by his primitivism and by his tendency towards sentimental narrative rather than rigorous political analysis. These tendencies were symptomatic of Griffith’s petty-bourgeois subjectivism, to use Marxist terminology. Or, as Johnson phrases it, “He believes in the importance only of *personal* acts and decisions, not of those dictated from the outside” (1976:9). This limitation in his thinking meant that Griffith was incapable of analysing a situation in terms of objective economic, historical or class forces, which is almost certainly the source of what are now regarded as his extraordinary lapses from “political correctness”, such as his whitewashing of slavery. To Griffith, “there was a personal bond between master and slave which stood higher than the cold commercial relationship of employer and employee” (1976:9). A clearer example of petty-bourgeois idealism, disconnected from historical and economic realities, could hardly be imagined. Griffith’s idealism (in the negative, Marxist sense of that word) is also the source of what Tsivian has called “the distance separating the political message of *Oktyabr*’ from Griffith’s moralizing message in *Intolerance*” (1997:53).

## 2.8 Mayakovsky, montage cinema and the “social command”

The ideological tendentiousness of Soviet montage cinema – its status as a form of political rhetoric rather than a purely aesthetic endeavour – found another powerful model in the tendentious approach towards poetry taken by Vladimir Mayakovsky, who in some respects was regarded (and regarded himself) as the unofficial spokesman for the entire Russian left-wing avant-garde of the 1920s. Mayakovsky had asserted that “[p]oetry is at its very root tendentious” (Mayakovsky 1970:17), a claim which Eisenstein later echoed by asserting that “by ‘film’ I understand tendentiousness and nothing else” (Eisenstein 1988:75), and which is analogous to Vertov’s use of the Kino-eye for “the communist decoding of the world” (Vertov 1984:42). Mayakovsky had publically called for progressive artists to obey the “social command”; that is, to put their creative talent at the service of the political and social needs of the working class of revolutionary Russia.<sup>53</sup> This meant the repudiation of aestheticism or *l’art pour l’art*<sup>54</sup> – art had a duty to serve a political and ideological function in Soviet society, to be a weapon in

the class struggle. Peter Wollen quotes Mayakovsky’s own words:

The problem of art became that of the production of agitational verse: ‘I want the pen to equal the gun, to be listed with iron in industry. And the Politburo’s agenda: Item 1 to be Stalin’s report on “The Output of Poetry”.’ (1997:37)

It is important, however, to make a distinction between the “social command” and a direct order or artistic commission from the Soviet government. The “social command” actually refers to the direct social, cultural and political needs of the working people themselves, which the artist is presumed to understand from his own direct experience of life.<sup>55</sup> It must be distinguished from Eisenstein’s call in 1927 for an official State Plan for Soviet cinema (Eisenstein 1988:89-94), which was linked to his political support for the abolition of the NEP and for state planning of the economy as a whole. Moreover, his article describes only the state planning of the *logistics* of film-making – the efficient accumulation and distribution of the raw material out of which films can be constructed – rather than state control of the subject matter and political content of films. Eisenstein seems to have assumed that there would be an automatic congruence between the film-makers’ political and artistic ideas and those of the Soviet state, and moreover that the Soviet state was necessarily the embodiment of the political will of the working class. In organisational terms, then, Eisenstein’s vision of a State Plan was top-down, whereas Mayakovsky’s concept of the “social command” was bottom-up.

Mayakovsky himself had been actively involved in cinema from as early as 1913, as a critic, scenarist and actor.<sup>56</sup> In his first three articles on cinema, Mayakovsky had been able to perceive only the potential of cinema to passively record events and its own capacity to be mechanically reproduced. He therefore denied that cinema could be an art form in its own right, and regarded it merely as a stimulus to advance theatrical art in the same way that photography had advanced easel painting in the direction of abstraction. Cinema would therefore serve as an example of what *not* to do:

This is where cinema sneaks up: ‘If your task is solely to copy nature, why do you need all these complicated theatrical props when on ten yards of canvas you can show both the ocean in its “natural” size and the movement of millions of people in the city?’ (Taylor and Christie 1988:35)

His conclusion was forthrightly negative: “Only the artist evokes from real life the images of art, while cinema can be either a successful or unsuccessful multiplier of his images [. . .]. Cinema and art are phenomena of a different order” (1988:36).

Mayakovsky was certainly not alone at that time in his low estimation of the artistic potential of cinema; even a stage director as progressive as Vsevolod Meyerhold was hostile to the idea of cinema as a legitimate art form. However, that negative attitude did not last long. Once film-makers began to cut and to edit their films, Mayakovsky began to perceive the potential of cinema to articulate new forms of narrative and new forms of quasi-poetic rhetoric. This, allied with its capacity to directly record actuality, led him to recognise that cinema had the potential to be a significant new art form in its own right. By 1918, he had written three scenarios which were actually filmed, with Mayakovsky himself playing the leading roles. He went on to write eleven film scripts altogether, only three of which were produced: *The Young Lady and the Hooligan* (1918) (directed by Yevgeni Slavinsky), *Not Born to be Rich* (1918) (directed by Nikandr Turkin), and *Shackled by Film* (1918) (also directed by Turkin).<sup>57</sup> At the same time, his critical writing about cinema revealed an increasing awareness of cinema as a potentially radical new art form.

By the mid-1920s, during his editorship of the journal *LEF*, Mayakovsky vehemently supported Dziga Vertov and Esfir Shub in their advocacy of documentary film, and he joined them in denouncing the rising tide of commercial Soviet films and the foreign imports of Hollywood romances which sharply increased during the NEP period.<sup>58</sup> Mayakovsky, like Vertov, believed that cinema could be used as an ideological weapon to change the political consciousness of its audience, if only they could first be weaned off their addiction to what both he and Vertov saw as the saccharine movies of the Hollywood “Dream Factory” and their Soviet equivalents. Mayakovsky’s support for Vertov was symbolised by the issue of *Kino-fot*<sup>59</sup> in which Mayakovsky published a humorous poem about cinema above a photograph of Vertov. Mayakovsky’s connection with Vertov was always far closer than with Eisenstein or Pudovkin; if anyone can be called Mayakovsky’s disciple in cinema, it was Dziga Vertov.

In fact, the connection between Mayakovsky and Vertov went deeper than merely Mayakovsky’s public support for Vertov’s film-making. Throughout his career, Vertov had written Futurist poetry in the style of Mayakovsky, and most of his manifestos and published articles were imitative of the declamatory rhetor-

ical style of the Futurist manifestos written by Mayakovsky, Burliuk and others. Vertov even seems to have modelled his working procedures as a film-maker on what he understood to be those advocated by Mayakovsky for poetic production. It is worth quoting in full the list of what Mayakovsky put forward as the essential prerequisites for the creation of socially and politically useful poetry in his book *How are Verses Made?*:

What basic propositions are indispensable, when one begins poetical work?

First thing. The presence of a problem in society, the solution of which is conceivable only in poetical terms. A social command [...].

Second thing. An exact knowledge, or rather intuition, of the desires of your class (or the group you represent) on the question, i.e. a standpoint from which to take aim.

Third thing. Materials. Words. Fill your storehouse constantly, fill the granaries of your skull with all kinds of words, necessary, expressive, rare, invented, renovated and manufactured.

Fourth thing. Equipment for the plant and tools for the assembly line. A pen, a pencil, a typewriter, a telephone, an outfit for your visits to the doss-house, a bicycle for your trips to the publishers, a table in good order, an umbrella for writing in the rain, a room measuring the exact number of paces you have to take when you're working, connection with a press agency to send you information on questions of concern to the provinces and so and so forth, and even a pipe and cigarettes.

Fifth thing. Skills and techniques of handling words, extremely personal things, which come only with years of daily work: rhymes, metres, alliteration, images, lowering of style, pathos, closure, finding a title, layout, and so on and so forth. (Mayakovsky 1970:18-19)

These five “basic propositions” for poetic creation directly correspond very closely with the working methods used by Vertov when making his documentary films:

Firstly, there must be a “social command” in obedience to which the film is made. Secondly, the film-maker must serve the needs of a particular social class, the proletariat, and the film must be made from the viewpoint of that class. Thirdly, raw film material must be assembled over an extended period of time so that it is to hand when it is needed, to be assembled into a new film. Vertov kept archives of such raw footage, and even displays his archive to us in *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Fourthly, in his films, Vertov foregrounded the actual

equipment used in film-making – the editing table and of course the camera are themselves filmed. And fifthly, Vertov’s films are of course veritable *tours de force* of skill and technique in filming and editing.

Eisenstein did not directly follow Mayakovsky’s example, though he did pay tribute to Mayakovsky as a progenitor of montage in his poetic technique; Eisenstein claimed that Mayakovsky “does not divide his verse by lines [...] but by ‘frames’ [...] Mayakovsky chops up the line in the way that an experienced montage editor would do it” (Eisenstein 1991:322). However, Eisenstein did not highlight Mayakovsky as an inspiration more than he did Dickens, Griffith or Pushkin. Eisenstein was essentially using Mayakovsky’s poetry merely as another example of montage as a universal artistic principle, which was a theoretical interest of his at the time, rather than claiming Mayakovsky as a direct progenitor in the way that Vertov did.

One reason for Eisenstein’s reticence may have been Mayakovsky’s insistence on the importance of using documentary materials in artistic work:

(1) Let’s drop all this gibberish about unfurling the ‘epic canvas’ during a period of war on the barricades – your canvas will be torn to shreds on all sides. (2) The value of factual material (and this is why documentary reports from the workers’ and peasants’ journalists are so interesting) must be marked at a higher price – and under no circumstances at a lower one – than so-called ‘poetical works’. Premature ‘poeticization’ only emasculates and mangles the material. (Mayakovsky 1970:34)

As Elizabeth Henderson has said of one of Mayakovsky’s major poems, “Instead of metaphors and imaginative fictions, *It’s Good!* ‘drinks from the river named ‘Fact,’” to quote the poem’s prologue” (1978:158) and “[f]or the storming of the Winter Palace Majakovskij tried to achieve the effect of a newsreel” (1978:159). This idea resonated more with Dziga Vertov’s film-making practice than with Eisenstein’s; indeed, Petrić goes so far as to claim that “Mayakovsky’s ‘factual poetry’ [...] inspired Vertov to formulate his ‘Film-Eye’ and ‘Radio-Eye’ methods” (1987:35). Both Eisenstein and Pudovkin, by contrast, created films which sought to encompass epic historical-political events and present them in a fictionalised form, something Mayakovsky specifically advised against. Vertov followed Mayakovsky’s advice more closely; his films are constructed out of documentary material of life in contemporary Soviet society, and Vertov resolutely refused to aestheticise the raw material he worked with. Eisenstein and Pudovkin were

much more willing to “unfurl their epic canvases”, and were quite prepared to fictionalise and aestheticise historical events. Eisenstein’s depiction of the storming of the Winter Palace in *October*, for example, while wildly inaccurate in its depiction, has almost completely supplanted the actual historical event itself in the minds of most people. Such a falsification of the public consciousness of historical reality would have been abhorrent to Mayakovsky and to Vertov; Mayakovsky’s bitter criticism of the way Eisenstein portrayed Lenin in *October*, using the untrained actor Vasili Nikandrov to pose as Lenin rather than using authentic news-reel footage, indicates his feelings in this regard. By contrast, the treatment of Lenin in Vertov’s film *Three Songs About Lenin* (1934) is directly comparable to Mayakovsky’s treatment of Lenin in his poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* (1924). Both are concerned with the historical documentation of the presented events, which can be related to the Constructivist concept of the “art of fact” which required the artist not to falsify the actual matter, but to register or record it faithfully before putting it into a new context.

It seems clear that Dziga Vertov consciously modelled himself on Mayakovsky, and aspired to be to Soviet cinema what Mayakovsky was to Soviet poetry. Petrić has certainly endorsed that idea:

And if there is a Soviet contemporary of Vertov to whom he should be compared, both ideologically and psychologically, it could only be Mayakovsky. To equate Vertov with Trotsky (“cinema’s Trotsky”)<sup>60</sup> seems unjustifiable [...]. It is therefore more appropriate to call Vertov the “Mayakovsky of cinema.” (1987:35)

Vertov himself even directly compared Mayakovsky’s poetic consciousness with the “kino-eye” with which Vertov hoped to reveal the inner truth of the world:

Mayakovsky is a kino-eye. He sees that which the eye does not see [...]. Kino-eye is a Mayakovsky<sup>61</sup> against the background of international film production’s clichés. (Vertov 1984:180)

Vertov’s self-identification with Mayakovsky could not be clearer.

Moreover, Vertov believed that he could avoid the twin pitfalls of formalism and of naturalism by following Mayakovsky’s example in ensuring the unity of form and content in his work:

The problem lies in not separating form from content. The problem is one of unity of form and content. Of not permitting oneself to confuse the

viewer by showing him a trick or technique not generated by the content and uncalled or by necessity. (1984:187)

He believed he could achieve this unity by studying both folk art and the poetry of Mayakovsky:

The unity of form and content – that is what strikes one in folk art, and that’s what strikes one in Mayakovsky as well.

I work in the poetic documentary film. That’s why both the songs of the people and Mayakovsky’s poetry are very near and familiar to me (1984:183).

However, the most important example which Mayakovsky provided Vertov’s film-making was to show that startling and complex images could be created by breaking linear continuity and by subverting narrative expectations. In Petrić’s words,

Mayakovsky produced complex poetic images by breaking up common syntax and by forcing the reader to abandon the rational search for a sequential order and thematic progression in poetry. Similarly, Vertov relied on the intricate juxtaposition and inversion of filmed fragments (shots) with the intention of disrupting the film’s linear development and thwarting the reader’s narrative expectations. (1987:29)

It was in this sense that montage film-making was, as Viktor Shklovsky pointed out at the time, a “poetic” form of cinema as opposed to the “prosaic” film-making practice of conventional mainstream Hollywood or Soviet films. Indeed, Alexandra Smith has referred to “the striking analogies between poetry and [montage] cinema” (Smith 2006:34). Vertov even claimed inspiration from the Cubo-Futurists’ poetic device of *zaum*<sup>62</sup> while filming *Three Songs about Lenin*:

I had to write poems and short stories, dry reports, travel sketches, dramatic episodes, and *zaum* word-combinations; I had to make outlines and diagrams – and all this to achieve the graphic, crystalline combination of a particular sequence of shots. (1984:135)

The Cubo-Futurist poets, of whom Mayakovsky was a leading member, were concerned with the function and aesthetic impact of the “word as such”, that is, the word detached from any literal meaning. In the “transrational” *zaum* language, in the words of Anna Lawton, “the images in this poem are liberated from any

kind of causal relationship and arranged in rhythmic segments”, thereby “endowing the text with a new and fresh meaning based on analogical relationships – a meaning which relies on the participation of the reader’s intuition” (1977:66). The weakening of the link between the signifier and the signified associated with the use of *zaum* led to the poetic language of *zaum* deriving much of its significance and meaning from the particular juxtaposition of signifiers rather than from their reference to their signifieds. This is analogous to the way in which the montage fragments of Vertov’s films – and of montage films in general – are given their meaning retrospectively by their juxtaposition with other montage fragments rather than from the signified objects the images in the montage fragments supposedly represent. In the most extreme cases, the images in the montage films become almost completely abstract and “non-objective”, to use Malevich’s phrase, pure signifiers detached from any signified object.<sup>63</sup> For example, the spinning reel of steel cable repeatedly shown towards the end of *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Fig. 7.2) is reminiscent of some of Malevich’s abstract canvases. As Petrić has noted, Vertov even claimed Mayakovsky as his inspiration in the development of sound montage: “Reflecting back on his earlier work, he confirms that he ‘discovered the key to recording documentary sounds while analyzing the musical rhythms of Mayakovsky’s poems’” (1987:36). This is actually quite plausible, as Vertov’s earliest experiments in montage were with recorded sounds in the 1910s, and these experiments were directly inspired by the Futurist poets’ experimentation with the “word as such” and with *zaum*, in which the actual sounds of poetry were detached from any literal meaning and were then fragmented and juxtaposed, as in the poetry of Khlebnikov or Kruchenykh.

Only five days before committing suicide, Mayakovsky presented a lecture at the Plekhanov Institute of Economics in Moscow in which he responded to criticism of his poetry as being “difficult”:

In fifteen or twenty years, the cultural level of the workers will be raised so high that all my works will be understood [...]. I am amazed at the illiteracy of this audience. I never expected such a low cultural level from the students of such a high and respected educational institution. (Qtd. in Marshall 1965:71)

Vertov shared with Mayakovsky the somewhat contradictory position that poetry or cinema should educate the masses and that the poet or film-maker should therefore be in the artistic and political vanguard (literally, the “avant-garde”),



leading the masses to an appreciation of more complex art and to greater political consciousness, while at the same time their work should have popular appeal. Maintaining that contradictory position required a certain act of faith on the part of Vertov: he believed that his films could not be understood *by a certain type* of audience, namely the petty-bourgeois “NEP audience”, but would be readily understood and appreciated by a working class audience. As Vertov asserted,

*Kinopravda* is being shown daily in many workers’ clubs in Moscow and the provinces, and with great success. And if the NEP audience prefers “love” or “crime” dramas that doesn’t mean that our works are unfit. It means the public is. (1984:32)

Like Mayakovsky, Vertov had faith in the revolutionary and intellectual potential of the working class: “As if in mockery of their literary nursemaids, the workers and peasants turn out to be brighter than their self-appointed nursemaids” (1984:38). This faith led him to make films for the working class which required active intellectual effort from the audience in order to be understood. As Mayakovsky said of his own poetry, “I agree that poems must be understood, but the reader must be understanding as well” (qtd. in Marshall 1965:66). Vertov expressed the same idea in very similar terms:

One of the chief accusations leveled at us is that we are not intelligible to the masses.

Even if one allows that some of our work is difficult to understand, does that mean we should not undertake serious exploratory work at all?

If the masses need light propaganda pamphlets, does that mean they don’t need the serious articles of Engels, Lenin? (1984:37-38)

Vertov was virtually accusing his critics of being condescending towards the working class. The principal aim of Vertov’s politically committed film-making was to raise the cultural and political consciousness of the working class. As far as Vertov was concerned, to criticise his films for being incomprehensible to the masses was to display a lack of faith in the intelligence and the potential for intellectual growth of the working class itself. Vertov was undoubtedly strengthened in his resolve to maintain that position in the face of increasing critical attacks that were to be mounted against him in the 1930s as a “formalist” whose work was incomprehensible to the masses by Mayakovsky’s own principled stand on this issue.

## Chapter 3

# Soviet Montage Cinema as Propaganda

The Soviet montage directors all perceived themselves, in various ways, as propagandists. However, before Soviet montage cinema can be properly investigated as a form of propaganda, it is first essential to define what is meant by the word “propaganda”, as well as to establish and investigate the link between propaganda and rhetoric as a means of constructing persuasive discourses. The fact that propaganda is a complex phenomenon with various modalities and strategies has implications for the relationship between the spectator and the filmic text and for the effect (both intended and actual) of a propaganda film on its audience. This chapter will therefore establish the link between the montage method and the construction of political propaganda, and will present the differences between the montage directors’ various approaches to propaganda, especially regarding the particular mode of propaganda they employed, as well as noting the progressive divergence between their views of how cinema should be used as a propaganda medium and that of the Soviet government in the 1930s.

### 3.1 Defining “propaganda”

The definition of the word “propaganda” is highly contentious, its meaning and status having changed radically over the course of the twentieth century. Indeed, the word “propaganda” has distinctly negative connotations now, and is usually used in a deprecatory sense to describe something which is felt to be artistically crude and which deliberately presents a false image of reality. However, this was

certainly not the way that propaganda was viewed in the Soviet Union, especially not in the 1920s. At that time and that place, propaganda was seen as a means of enlightening the masses, of *revealing* reality to them rather than distorting or concealing it.

Defining propaganda is notoriously problematic; one person’s “propaganda” might be another’s “education”. As Nicholas Jackson O’Shaughnessy points out, “How we define propaganda is in fact the expression of the theories we hold about propaganda” (2004:14); even the recognition of an act of communication as a form of propaganda can be seen to be dependent on the ideological distance which separates the observer from the act of communication observed. Peter Kenez has emphasised the (sometimes unconscious) ideological motivation which underlies most attempts to define propaganda:

we have no precise definition that would be value free and valid regardless of time or political culture. Social scientists, no doubt unwittingly, have often defined propaganda in such a way as to make their definition into an ideological weapon. They have searched for a definition that covers only the activities of people whose point of view they do not like. (1985:1)

Indeed, Leonard W. Doob has gone so far as to assert that “a clear-cut definition of propaganda is neither possible nor desirable” (1989:375), and it certainly seems impossible to provide a definition which captures some abstract conceptual essence of propaganda, as O’Shaughnessy has pointed out (2004:18). However, a working definition of what precisely is meant by the term “propaganda” in a given context is absolutely necessary. As Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell have said, “in order to analyze propaganda, one needs to be able to recognize it. A definition sets forth propaganda’s characteristics and aids our recognition of it” (1992:3).

In its most ideologically neutral sense, “propaganda” merely refers to the dissemination or promotion of particular ideas. The word is derived from the Latin *propagare*, meaning “to sow”, and its original usage was not pejorative. The earliest use of the term “propaganda” was in the early seventeenth century: the Vatican established the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (the Sacred Congregation for Propagating the Faith [of the Roman Catholic Church]) in 1622, as part of the Counter-Reformation. This project of “propagating” the Catholic faith met with resistance from the Protestants of Europe as well as from the natives of the Americas, which it aggressively sought to overcome. The word “propaganda”

thereby acquired some of its current negative connotations, especially among the ruling elites of the nations targeted by that propaganda. Jowett and O'Donnell have noted that

[i]n his study of propaganda, Qualter (1962) points out that the Catholic origins of the word ['propaganda'] gave it a sinister connotation in the Northern Protestant countries that it does not have in Southern Catholic countries" [...]. This largely negative connotation [...] continues to cloud the discussion of propaganda. (1992:54)

The negative connotations of the word “propaganda”, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, therefore have a specific historical origin in the Counter-Reformation, a historical experience not shared by Russia. Russian culture in the early twentieth century was therefore far more receptive than Western societies to the idea of propaganda as a positive and even necessary practice, both on the part of governments and even creative artists.

In this respect, there tends to be a certain element of self-righteous hypocrisy in Western nations where the issue of propaganda is concerned. For example, despite their attempts to blame the Germans for starting the propaganda war,<sup>64</sup> it was actually the Allies who were the first to employ modern propaganda techniques during the Great War, as the German Chief of Staff General Ludendorff belatedly recognised in a letter sent to the Imperial Ministry of War in 1917:

The war has demonstrated the superiority of the photograph and the film as means of information and persuasion. Unfortunately, our enemies have used their advantage over us in this field so thoroughly that they have inflicted a great deal of damage [...]. For this reason it is of the utmost importance for a successful conclusion to the war that films should be made to work with the greatest possible effect wherever any German persuasion might still have any effect. (Qtd. in Furhammer and Isaksson 1971:11)

As Ellul has observed,

It is a remarkable fact worthy of attention that modern propaganda should have begun in the democratic states. During World War I we saw the combined use of the mass media for the first time; the application of publicity and advertising methods to political affairs, the search for the most effective psychological methods. [...] Contrary to some belief, the authoritarian regimes were not the first to resort to this type of action, though they eventually employed it beyond all limits. (1973:232-33)

The Soviet government’s use of propaganda, while more overt and more intensive than that of Western governments, was not something which set the Soviet government apart from its Western counterparts; it was a difference of degree rather than of kind. Likewise, the Soviet montage directors’ use of cinema for the purposes of political propaganda was not essentially different from Hollywood cinema’s status as propaganda for a certain ideology, as Edward Bernays frankly admitted in 1928 (2005:166) and as Oudart (1978) and Dayan (1974) among others have sought to demonstrate. The difference was in the mode of propaganda being used and in the relationship between the spectator and the filmic text and the particular effect on the audience which the montage film-makers wished to achieve with their propaganda films. In this chapter, I shall try to determine the precise nature of that difference.

Moreover, the current negative connotations surrounding the word “propaganda” in the West only really became widespread in the 1920s following the revelations of the manipulation of public opinion by the Allies during the Great War. Before then, the public had not been widely conscious of the existence of propaganda<sup>65</sup> and the negative view of the Catholic Church’s propaganda was largely confined to the numerically small ruling class of the Northern European Protestant countries, who viewed it as a tactic used by subversives to undermine legitimate authority rather than used by governments to manipulate their subjects. For example, an English encyclopedist called W. T. Brande wrote in the mid-nineteenth century that “[d]erived from this celebrated society [of Pope Gregory] the name propaganda is applied in modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion” (qtd. in Jowett and O’Donnell 1992:54); his choice of words indicates that he believed it was specifically the ruling elite who regarded only *a certain type* of propaganda directed at a certain target in a negative light.

In his seminal comparative study of Soviet and Nazi film propaganda, Richard Taylor begins by attempting to give a definition of propaganda: “What then is ‘propaganda’? Propaganda is the attempt to influence the public opinions of an audience through the transmission of ideas and values” (Taylor 1998:15). And he concludes that “[p]ropaganda is concerned with the transmission of ideas and/or values from one person, or group of persons, to another. Where ‘propagation’ is the action, there ‘propaganda’ is the activity” (1998:7). This definition has the

merit of emphasising the connection between propaganda and communication, specifically the rhetorical communication of ideas and values, while not passing any value judgement on the truth or worth of those ideas and values. It also has the merit of not implying that propaganda necessarily appeals only to the emotions rather than the reason of its audience. In fact, Taylor does raise the question of whether a “rational propaganda” could indeed exist, which has implications concerning the distinction between propaganda and education (1998:12). Taylor, however, seems to imply that propaganda can never encourage critical thinking when he claims that

[w]riting of the distinction between education and ‘propaganda’, Brown<sup>66</sup> remarks that ‘education’ teaches people *how* to think, while propaganda teaches them *what* to think. This is a distinction that might usefully be adapted to distinguish between information and ‘propaganda’. (1998:12; original emphasis)

He goes further, claiming that propaganda actually aims to close people’s minds, to end critical thinking:

But education is concerned with opening minds, ‘propaganda’ with closing them. Therein lies the vital difference, for education will ultimately lead its audience to question the values upon which it is itself based, whereas ‘propaganda’ aims only to make its audience accept those values, and sometimes to act upon the acceptance too. (1998:13)

This approach is similar in intent to Jowett and O’Donnell’s attempts to specify a distinction between propaganda and informative communication. According to them,

Communication has been defined as a convergence process in which sender and receiver, either through mediated or nonmediated means, create and share information. When the information is used to accomplish a purpose of sharing, explaining, or instructing, this is considered to be informative communication. (Jowett and O’Donnell 1992:19)

They also claim that

[i]nformative discourse is communication about subject matter that has attained the privileged status of being beyond dispute. Whenever information is regarded as disputable by either the sender or receiver, it is difficult for the communication to proceed as information. (1992:18-19)

This seems to me to miss the point: if propaganda *works* on a population, if it is successful in its aim of forming their opinions, then by definition the relevant subject matter will of course be “beyond dispute” in the sense that it will not even occur to anyone to dispute the truth of what they are being told. As Kenez has remarked,

The Soviet people ultimately came not so much to believe the Bolsheviks’ world view as to take it for granted. Nobody remained to point out the contradictions and even inanity inherent in the regime’s slogans. In circumstances where only one point of view can be expressed, the distinction between belief and nonbelief and truth and untruth is washed away. (1985:253)

It might be added that Jowett and O’Donnell’s distinction between “propaganda” and “informative discourse” is also washed away.

Attempts to deprecate propaganda as an “illegitimate” form of discourse are usually accompanied by attempts to define a contrasting “legitimate” form of discourse; for example, either “information” in Taylor’s case (1998), “informative discourse” in the case of Jowett and O’Donnell (1992) or “rhetoric” in the case of Bennett and O’Rourke (2006). Such attempts are seldom convincing, and actually stem from an impoverished understanding of the nature of propaganda itself. Far from there being a meaningful distinction between propaganda and rhetoric, the two are actually closely and inextricably linked, rhetoric being one of the indispensable means employed by a propagandist to persuade his or her audience of something. In O’Shaughnessy’s words, “Along with symbolism and myths, rhetoric performs a key role in propaganda and the three are intertwined” (2004:66). Likewise, a propagandist often regards his or her own propaganda as a form of “informative discourse”, and in fact even Josef Goebbels insisted that Nazi propaganda must be as factually accurate as possible (Ellul 1973:54,n).<sup>67</sup> Bernays also made the point in 1928 that “[t]he only propaganda which will ever tend to weaken itself as the world becomes more sophisticated and intelligent, is propaganda that is untrue or unsocial” (Bernays 2005:122). Propaganda therefore cannot be fundamentally distinguished from the concept of informative discourse, being essentially a particular type of informative communication: *persuasive* communication, in the sense defined by Jowett and O’Donnell:

Persuasion as a subset of communication is usually defined as a commu-

nicative process to influence others. A persuasive message has a point of view or a desired behavior for a recipient to adopt in a voluntary fashion. (1992:21)

As will be seen, the voluntary nature of the recipient’s adoption of the desired viewpoint or behaviour is open to dispute. It can be argued that the recipient may believe his adoption of a particular viewpoint or new behaviour under the influence of a “persuasive communication” to be entirely voluntary, when in fact it is involuntary or even altogether unconscious. This is in fact what Jean-Pierre Oudart (1978) and Daniel Dayan (1974) claim to be the case with the “system of the suture” in Hollywood movies, the famous “tutor-code of classical cinema”. They insist on “the brutality, on the tyranny with which this signification imposes itself on the spectator or [...] ‘transits through him’” (Dayan 1974:31), a “tyranny” of which they claim the spectator is not consciously aware.

And it is insufficient to define (illegitimate) “propaganda” as being directed at a mass audience while (legitimate) “persuasion” is directed at the individual, as Jowett and O’Donnell claim when they say that “[p]ropaganda tends to be linked with a general societal process whereas persuasion is regarded as an individual psychological process” (1992:17). On the contrary, as Ellul has pointed out, propaganda addresses both the mass and the individual simultaneously:

Any modern propaganda will, first of all, address itself at one and the same time to the individual and to the masses. It cannot separate the two elements. [...] [P]ropaganda does not aim simply at the mass, the crowd. [...] Modern propaganda reaches individuals enclosed in the mass, yet it also aims at a crowd, but only as a body composed of individuals. (1973:6)

And this is never more true than in the case of cinema:

The movie spectator also is alone; though elbow to elbow with his neighbors, he still is, because of the darkness and the hypnotic attraction of the screen, perfectly alone. This is the situation of the “lonely crowd,” or of isolation in the mass, which is a natural product of present-day society and which is both used and deepened by the mass media. The most favorable moment to seize a man and influence him is when he is alone in the mass: it is at this point that propaganda can be most effective. (1973:8-9)

This implies that cinema is actually, in many respects, the mass medium most ideally suited to being used for propaganda purposes and for the rhetorical per-



suasion of an audience, both for the way in which it simultaneously gathers people together and isolates them, and for its creation of a stream of visual images on the audience's sensoria. Rhetoric has traditionally relied on visual images and metaphoric figures for its effect, as O'Shaughnessy has emphasised:

the key to rhetorical persuasion is the manufacture of visual images. [...] Through reflection, images accumulate meaning. For Mason (1989) a live metaphor is a switchboard 'hopping with signals': important issues are up for grabs via such rhetorical devices because they are the ones with inherent indeterminacy, an absence of analytical proof. Potentially metaphors can fracture existing paradigms of thought and introduce new ones because their very vividness assaults our attention and lives on in our memory, and in this they are special, since subverting existing and often culturally determined ideologies is the hardest thing for a propagandist to do. (2004:72)

Eisenstein's concept of the "generalised image" (Eisenstein 1991:26-27) can therefore be seen in this light: as an embodiment of the generalising, rhetorical power of images, which lends itself to the creation of propaganda.

### 3.2 Cinema and propaganda in the Soviet Union

The usual Western attempts to define propaganda are therefore, to my mind, too narrow and have too many ideological presuppositions built into them to properly encompass the full uses to which propaganda was being put in the Soviet Union, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. It is worth noting that O'Shaughnessy also takes the standpoint that "current understandings [of propaganda] have erred in restricting its meaning" (2004:29). For cultural and historical reasons, propaganda did not have the same negative moral and political connotations in the Soviet Union which it had and still has in the West, and the Soviet montage directors' understanding of what propaganda is and what it could accomplish was far richer than is current in our own society. The Soviet authorities and many Soviet artists (especially those committed to a Marxist worldview, who included Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov) had an essentially *positive* view of propaganda. They saw it as an essential and constructive part of the new Soviet society, and one of the chief means by which they could contribute to the building of that society. To regard films like *Potemkin* or *The Mother* or *The Man with a Movie Camera* as propaganda is therefore not to denigrate them, or downgrade them

from the status of great art to “mere” agitprop, but to acknowledge the motivations which lay behind their creation, and to bring out those elements in these works which make them unique contributions to cinema art.

The Soviet authorities themselves certainly regarded cinema as being ideally suited to be used as a propaganda medium. Lenin famously asserted that “of all the arts for us the most important is cinema” (Taylor and Christie 1988:57). When used as a medium for propaganda, it certainly had some advantages for the Bolsheviks over other art forms such as the theatre. Its status as a mass-produced industrial product meant that it had a certain reliability of reproduction – the authorities could send out a film from the centre to be exhibited in the provinces and be sure that the content of the performance was fixed in advance and precisely reproducible, thus making it the most reliable and controllable form of political propaganda available to them. As Taylor has asserted, “cinema [was] the ideal propaganda weapon for the second quarter of the twentieth century” (1998:17). Trotsky summed up the view which the Soviet authorities took towards the propaganda potential of cinema when he bemoaned their own failure to make proper use of it in 1923:

The fact that we have so far, i.e., in nearly six years, not taken possession of cinema shows how slow and uneducated we are, not to say, frankly, stupid. This weapon, which cries out to be used, is the best instrument for propaganda [...] a propaganda which is accessible to everyone, cuts into the memory and may be made a possible source of revenue. (qtd. in Taylor 1998:35)

In fact, Stalin was merely echoing Trotsky when he proclaimed in 1924 that “[t]he cinema is the greatest means of mass agitation. The task is to take it into our own hands” (qtd. in Taylor 1979:64). In Taylor’s words,

Trotsky felt that, whereas religion had been the opiate of the people in feudal society, and vodka had played a similar role in the capitalist stage of Russia’s development, cinema would serve as the great eye-opener for the masses, the liberating educational weapon of a socialist society.<sup>68</sup> (1998:35)

The Soviet government would have understood an “educational weapon”, of course, to be a *propaganda* weapon in the hands of the political vanguard of the proletariat. For the Soviet authorities, as for the montage directors, to educate and to propagandise were essentially the same activity; as Kenez has pointed out,

“a synonym for propaganda in early Bolshevik parlance was ‘political education work’” (1985:8). As A. I. Krinitsky put it in his report to the 1928 cinema conference, ‘The Results of the Construction of Cinema in the USSR and the Tasks of Soviet Cinematography’:

Cinema, like every art, cannot be apolitical. Cinema must be an instrument of the proletariat in its struggle for hegemony, leadership and influence in relation to other classes and ‘in the hands of the Party it must be the most powerful medium of Communist enlightenment and agitation’ (in the resolution of the 13th. Congress of the Party). (Taylor and Christie 1988:208)

It was not just the Soviet government itself which had this attitude, and not just regarding cinema. From the beginning of the 1920s, many artists in the Soviet Union, such as the Constructivists, were vehemently proclaiming that industrial art and propaganda were the proper fields for the artist’s endeavours rather than the creation of autonomous works of art separate from everyday life. Mayakovsky, for example, asserted that his advertising jingles for Mosselprom<sup>69</sup> or his window posters for ROSTA<sup>70</sup> were as valuable as anything else he had written.

Mayakovsky’s advertising work for Mosselprom is a salutary reminder that not only governments make propaganda: “There is little doubt that under any definition of propaganda, the practice of advertising would have to be included” (Jowett and O’Donnell 1992:117). Indeed, Edward Bernay’s seminal 1928 book on propaganda (Bernays 2005) dealt almost exclusively with the commercial application of propaganda techniques, or “public relations” as he called them. Interestingly enough, Vertov also made some short animated advertisements in the early 1920s, most notably *Soviet Toys* (1924); these could therefore also be included among his works of propaganda. Of course, Vertov took the opportunity while making commercial “propaganda” (in Bernays’ sense of the term) to create *political* propaganda at the same time, as Tsivian has noted (2004:93). In fact, the dividing line between commercial propaganda (advertising) and political propaganda was somewhat blurred throughout Vertov’s career: during the NEP period, Vertov created many advertisements for commercial enterprises (Vertov 1984:25-31), and his film *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926) was sponsored by GOSTORG, the state agency for foreign trade, as a feature-length advertisement of its activities (Feldman 1977:121).

It is in the context of this determination to use cinema for propaganda purposes that the famous “Leninist proportion”, which provided such grist to Dziga

Vertov's polemical mill, should therefore be interpreted. Contrary to Vertov's claims that Lenin was insisting on the presence of a certain proportion of newsreel and propaganda films in any exhibition of commercial films, Lenin was actually proposing a *restriction* on the proportion of such films. In other words, the status quo which Lenin was challenging was one in which predominantly agitational and newsreel films were being shown in cinemas, as had been the case during the Civil War period; Lenin was now insisting on the need for some commercial fiction films to be exhibited also. Lenin considered such a restriction on the number of propaganda films exhibited in cinemas to be desirable because of the need to attract audiences into the cinema theatres in the first place (a propaganda film which no-one watches is useless as propaganda, as Lunacharsky pointed out), and to bring in much-needed revenue from popular commercial films in order to rebuild the precarious finances of the Soviet film industry. Vertov was therefore being slightly mischievous in the way in which he deliberately chose to interpret the "Leninist proportion": he was invoking the magic name of Lenin in order to support his own polemical position, yet was essentially reversing the thrust of Lenin's argument.

The idea of newsreels and documentary films – which supposedly present reality rather than fiction – serving propagandistic aims should not be regarded as oxymoronic. After all, one of the most famous documentaries of all, Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1926), had originally been made as a propaganda film for a fur company (Jowett and O'Donnell 1992:93). Its status as propaganda does not automatically undermine its status as a "truthful" documentary; propaganda can be either factually accurate or factually inaccurate, or may even use factual inaccuracy to try to express a "higher truth".

Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov all agreed with this aim of using cinema as a propaganda weapon. In fact, the founder of Soviet montage cinema, Lev Kuleshov, asserted that the montage method itself was inseparable from the political ideology of the film-maker, in the sense that the montage juxtaposition of images and facts, no matter how politically neutral that raw material might be in itself, inevitably communicated an ideological position. Kuleshov quoted an example given by Eisenstein in one of his lectures at the State Institute of Cinematography concerning the editing of a newspaper:<sup>71</sup>

In a capitalist paper all the events would be edited so that the bourgeois intention of the editor, and accordingly, of the paper, would be maximally

expressed and emphasized through the character of the montage of the events, their arrangement on the newspaper page. The essential exploitativeness of the capitalist system would be clouded over in the bourgeois paper in every conceivable way, with the evils of the system concealed and the actuality embroidered. (Kuleshov 1974:185)

Kuleshov is describing something very close to what would later be called the “system of the suture”, which analyses how the ideology of a classical Hollywood film is simultaneously embodied in and concealed by the way in the film is constructed. Kuleshov continues by describing how

[t]he Soviet paper is edited completely otherwise: the information about these very same events would be edited so as to illuminate the entire condition of things in the capitalist world, to reveal its essential exploitativeness, and the position of the workers as it is in reality. (1974:185)

Leaving aside the issue of the accuracy of this account as a description of the actual practice of Soviet newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s, it at least makes clear how the Soviet montage film-makers regarded their own efforts to make films embodying a particular political ideology. Kuleshov goes on to assert that

[i]t can be proved, with the facts related to each other in this fashion, that the ideological sense of these facts would be differently apprehended by the reader of the paper. In the communist paper the class nature of the fact will be revealed, while in the bourgeois press this nature will be fogged over, perverted. (1974:185)

Kuleshov, and by his own implication Eisenstein too, clearly regarded the bourgeois newspaper – and by extension the bourgeois films of the classical cinema – as having a fundamentally obscurantist effect on the audience. This obscurantism is the result of the film communicating an ideological position to the audience while simultaneously concealing the fact that it is doing so, thereby naturalising that ideological position in the mind of the audience. Montage, on the other hand, is presented by Kuleshov as a means of *revealing* the truth, of presenting a particular ideological position openly and without concealment, thereby “illuminat[ing]” and “reveal[ing]” the situation “as it is in reality”. The similarity with Vertov’s stated aspiration to reveal “life as it is” to the audience of his films is obvious. Kuleshov’s conclusion was that “film montage, as the entire work of filmmaking, is inextricably linked to the artist’s world-view and his ideological purpose”

(1974:184). In other words, the montage method itself was inevitably and inextricably linked to the mode of propaganda being used by the montage film-makers. Indeed, Kuleshov is strongly implying that the montage method cannot be understood other than as a method of constructing political propaganda, as a form of political rhetoric.

It should be noted, however, that Kuleshov's films are among the least politically tendentious of all the montage directors'; indeed, he came under increasing pressure from hostile Soviet critics in the late 1920s and early 1930s for precisely this reason. Kuleshov himself even admitted that

in the beginning of my work in cinema the question of montage, the questions of aesthetic theory generally, were questions which were substantially murky for me, and I did not connect them with class interpretations, with the world-view of the artist. (1974:185-86)

Kuleshov seems to have initially regarded montage as no more and no less than what Peter Bürger called it: "In the film, the montage of images is the basic *technical procedure*. It is not a specifically artistic technique, but one that lies in the medium" (1984:73; original emphasis). This attitude may account for Kuleshov's relatively conservative use of the montage method, his obsession with the popular genres of Hollywood classical cinema, and the generally apolitical nature of his earliest feature films. Kuleshov was initially seeking merely to use the "basic technical procedure" of montage to achieve a maximal efficiency of filmic discourse and maximal control over the signification process – to take bland or meaningless raw footage and use montage to construct meaningful cinematographic statements out of it. It seems that it was only when he fell under the influence of the other montage directors, especially Eisenstein, that Kuleshov's understanding of film montage became more politicised and he eventually perceived it as inextricably linked to ideology.

Indeed, Eisenstein himself made the link in 1930 between the political and propaganda needs of the Party at a given historical moment and the role of cinema in fulfilling those needs:

In the Soviet Union art is responsive to social aims and demands. One day, for example, all attention is centred on the village; it is imperative to raise the village from the slough of ancient custom and bring it into line with the Soviet system as a whole; the peasant must learn to see the difference

between private ownership and individualistic survivals on the one hand, and co-operation and collective economy on the other. SOS!

The seismograph of the Party apparatus notes a vacillation in this section of Soviet life. At once, all social thought is directed towards it. Throughout the country the press, literature, the fine arts are mobilised to ward off danger. The slogan is: 'Face the Village!' The smitchka [i.e., *smychka*], the union of proletarian and poor peasant, is established. Opponents of Soviet aims are ousted. The strongest propaganda guns are put into action; there begins a bombardment on behalf of socialist economy. Here the cinema plays a big role. (Qtd. in Taylor 1998:50-51)

Jacques Aumont has even pinpointed this as one of the elements of Eisenstein's thinking which was present from the beginning of his career and which never disappeared:

from the manifestos on the "aggressiveness" of the attractions (theatrical or filmic) to the militant declarations of principle in his last years, there is no break – the "fundamental activity" of the Soviet cinema is "to reeducate and exercise an influence upon the people" (Aumont 1987:189)

The political tendentiousness of montage cinema was actually considered noteworthy even for its time and place, as was its concentration on political education and propaganda at the expense of characterisation and other aesthetic criteria normally considered essential for cinema. In fact, Gorky himself is said to have disapproved of Pudovkin's film version of his novel *The Mother*, precisely because of its propagandistic tendencies – he regarded it as too politically tendentious and as paying too little regard to the maternal motivation of the central character (Leyda 1983:206,n, Sargeant 2000:70). This is especially significant, as Pudovkin is usually considered the montage director who is *most* concerned with characterisation.

Dziga Vertov also made clear his own commitment to the use of cinema as a "film-weapon" in the hands of the Communist state:

The battle against the blinding of the masses, the battle for vision can and must begin only in the USSR, where the film-weapon is in the hands of the state.

*To see and show the world in the name of the worldwide proletarian revolution* – that is the most basic formula of the kinoks. (Vertov 1984:39-40; original emphasis)

Throughout the 1920s, the montage directors were left free to work out for themselves the details of how to use cinema as a propaganda weapon in the service of the Communist cause. And indeed, while Eisenstein and Vertov in particular may have agreed on the overall purpose of cinema as propaganda, they certainly did not see eye-to-eye regarding the means by which that aim was to be achieved. However, this relatively tolerant attitude of the Soviet regime regarding the precise way in which cinema could be used as a propaganda medium was not to last beyond the early 1930s.

### 3.3 Rhetoric and transactive propaganda

The techniques and resources of rhetoric are often removed entirely from the realm of propaganda for ideological reasons. This is done, for example, by Bennett and O'Rourke, who have criticised

the conflation of rhetoric and propaganda, with little more than simplistic and often unexplored distinctions between reason and emotion or instruction and indoctrination. (2006:60)

Such a distinction is essentially based on whether the discourse's appeal is to reason or emotion. Their definition of "propaganda" largely conforms to that of Taylor, contrasting a rhetorical appeal which stimulates reason with a propagandistic appeal which (in their view) suppresses reason and is intended to arouse only emotion:

Rhetoric, in this way, seeks to promote a thinking response. [...] Propaganda usually seeks to short-circuit a thinking response. It prefers a reactionary, behavioral response where thought is minimized, reflection diminished, and investigation largely eliminated. It seeks to limit the aspects of response to the affective dimension and envisions nothing less desirable than a thinking target. (2006:68)

However, in many respects it is precisely this concept of "rhetoric" (which Bennett and O'Rourke oppose to what they call "propaganda") which is close to what the Soviet montage directors themselves regarded as "propaganda" and which corresponds to what Brecht called for in 1934: "Propaganda that stimulates thinking" (Brecht 1966:146). The distinction between "good" rhetoric and "bad" propaganda was simply not one which was recognised by the Soviet montage film-makers. To



include rhetoric within our definition of propaganda might therefore enrich it sufficiently to enable us to analyse the ways in which the Soviet montage directors used montage in the enunciation of their filmic texts in order to achieve a rhetorical and propagandistic effect on the spectators.

Bennett and O'Rourke put their finger on what is usually taken to be the essential difference between rhetoric and propaganda when they state that "[w]e see important differences in the way rhetoric and propaganda approach the 'other'" (2006:66). In their view, propaganda (at least in the pejorative Western sense) does not respect the autonomy of the "other"; it is a monologue rather than a dialogue, and merely imposes its message on its audience. In reality, of course, propaganda is rarely as crude as that; what is crude and deficient is actually the concept of propaganda in our culture, and it is deficient precisely so far as it omits the rhetorical aspect of propaganda. In fact, the reciprocal nature of successful propaganda had been recognised by Bernays even as early as 1928 when he asserted that

[t]he public is not an amorphous mass which can be molded at will, or dictated to. Both business and the public have their own personalities which must somehow be brought into friendly agreement. [...] The relationship between business and the public can be healthy only if it is the relationship of give and take. (2005:86-87)

The montage directors also understood the rhetorical aspect of effective propaganda, although they deployed that rhetorical aspect in subtly different ways. Their definition of propaganda was such that it *did* respect the "other", at least to the extent of understanding the need for a two-way interactive process to occur for propaganda to be effective, and the need for an appeal to the reason as well as the emotions of the audience. In fact, it is precisely the reciprocal relationship between the propagandist and the propagandee which is often absent from Western analyses of propaganda, which tends to view propaganda one-sidedly as a one-way process, an imposition of the propagandist's views on the propagandee's passive psyche. Taylor's study of the film propaganda of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany (1998) seems to me to suffer from this failing, despite its other great merits; hence his entirely negative view of propaganda as a sedative rather than a stimulant, and as aimed at ending the thought process rather than stimulating it. O'Shaughnessy, by contrast, has emphasised the interactive aspect of successful propaganda:

When critics claim that propaganda is ‘manipulative’, they perhaps envisage a passive recipient. While some propaganda exchanges may resemble this stimulus-response form, what is often going on in the propaganda process may be more subtle. The idea of people willingly misled strikes at the root of concepts of man as a rational decision maker, yet surely this is what occurred in Serbia, Rwanda and elsewhere. (2004:114)

To examine Soviet montage cinema as propaganda, it must therefore be examined as a form of *rhetoric*, a method of persuasion. Furthermore, it is impossible to draw a clear line separating propaganda from rhetoric, from education or from the communication of information. That this is so can be seen, for example, in the logical weakness of Jowett and O’Donnell’s attempts to specify a distinction between propaganda and informative communication.

The purpose of propaganda in the minds of Eisenstein, Pudovkin or Vertov, despite their different attitudes towards the necessary or appropriate relationship between the propagandist and the propagandee, was essentially the same: to persuade the audience of the truth of a political ideology which they, the montage directors themselves, believed to be true. And it was essentially a dynamic and interactive process. As Jowett and O’Donnell put it,

Persuasion is a reciprocal process in which both parties are dependent upon one another. It is a situation of interactive or transactive dependency. Interactive suggests turn-taking; whereas, transactive suggests a more continuous and dynamic process of co-creating meaning. The persuader who understands that persuasion is interactive or a transaction in which both parties approach a message-event and use it to attempt to fulfill needs will never assume a passive audience. (1992:21)

The fact that the meaning of a text or communication is created through a transactive process has also been pointed out by Hovland and Janis (1959) and by Kellner (1995); Kellner in particular has described meaning as ultimately a co-production between text and viewer-receiver, who is more than merely a passive receptor of a pre-existent meaning.

Once that principle has been established, the question can then be raised as to the actual mechanism by which this transactive process occurs. The work of Alcorn and Bracher (1985) and of Alcorn (1987) is particularly relevant to this issue. Alcorn has proposed a psychoanalytic mechanism by which rhetoric could operate on the reader of a literary text so as to have a persuasive effect on him or

her, in the sense of producing a change in that reader's value structures through a transactive process linking the author (or rather, the text) and the reader of that text. I shall apply Alcorn's approach in order to investigate the means by which Soviet montage cinema achieves some of its rhetorical effects in the next chapter of this thesis.

### 3.4 Agitation propaganda and integration propaganda

In his major study of film propaganda, Richard Taylor claimed that "[t]he 'propagandist' deals not in the drugs of stimulation but in those of sedation; it is through anaesthesia that he hopes to achieve a reaction" (1998:13). This seems to me to be far too limited a way of regarding propaganda, particularly the forms of propaganda which existed in the Soviet Union. In a dictatorial society in which the authorities have the aim of pacifying the population and lulling them into political slumber, as for example in Franco's Spain, the propagandists will indeed "deal not in the drugs of stimulation but in those of sedation". However, the dictatorship of the Soviet Union (and also that of Nazi Germany) had as one of its chief aims the *mobilisation* of the population, not their sedation. The effect of most Soviet propaganda was far from sedative (at least in its intention); its aim was to provoke and agitate the audience, both emotionally and through their powers of reasoning. Far from wishing to sedate and pacify the Soviet people, the Soviet propagandists wished to raise the cultural level of the audience, to increase their awareness of the worldwide proletarian struggle, and to heighten their level of political and social consciousness. They repeatedly stated as much; for example, K. Mal'tsev said in 1927 that "[c]inema is not merely a medium of agitation and propaganda, but it is a powerful and a key factor with the aid of which we shall raise the masses to a higher cultural level" (qtd. in Taylor 1998:40). Stalin himself even called cinema "the greatest means of mass agitation", a phrase which inspired the wording of the 'Resolution of the Thirteenth Party Congress on Cinema' (Taylor and Christie 1988:111), as Taylor himself notes (1998:217,n.25). The point I wish to make here is that Soviet propaganda was being used to consciously try to raise the level of culture and the political consciousness of the audience, with the aim of agitating and mobilising them for the purpose of building socialism. This purpose required highly conscious and active

citizens, who were politically aware and could think rationally and critically. The Soviet regime's desire for politically conscious and activist citizens is indicated by the fact that, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there were many campaigns in which the Soviet government called upon ordinary workers and peasants to openly criticise the bureaucratic apparatus and to suggest methods of improving productivity.

In this respect, it is useful to draw a distinction between two different forms of propaganda, differentiated with respect to the audience response they attempt to elicit: *agitation* propaganda and *integration* propaganda. This distinction has been made by, for example, Jacques Ellul (1973:70-79) and by Jowett and O'Donnell (1992:8), who summarise the distinction as follows:

Sometimes propaganda is *agitative*, attempting to arouse an audience to certain ends, usually resulting in significant change; sometimes it is *integrative*, attempting to render an audience passive, accepting, and non-challenging. (1992:8)

Ellul has pointed out the particular use made of agitation propaganda by the Soviet government in particular:

Propaganda of agitation [...] reached its height with Lenin, which leads us to note that, though it is most often an opposition's propaganda, the propaganda of agitation can also be made by government. For example, when a government wants to galvanize energies to mobilize the entire nation for war, it will use a propaganda of agitation. [...] Governments also employ this propaganda of agitation when, after having been installed in power, they want to pursue a revolutionary course of action.<sup>72</sup> (1973:71)

And he makes the important point that, while agitation propaganda is characteristic of developing nations such as the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, it is integration propaganda which is actually the dominant mode of propaganda in developed nations such as our own:

In contrast to this propaganda of agitation is the propaganda of integration – the propaganda of developed nations and characteristic of our civilization; in fact it did not exist before the twentieth century. It is a propaganda of conformity. (1973:74)

The social and political purpose of integration propaganda is precisely the opposite to that of agitation propaganda. Ellul describes it succinctly:

Propaganda of integration thus aims at making the individual participate in his society in every way. It is a long-term propaganda, a self-reproducing propaganda that seeks to obtain stable behavior, to adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thoughts and behavior in terms of the permanent social setting. [...] Integration propaganda aims at stabilizing the social body, at unifying and reinforcing it. It is thus the preferred instrument of government [...]. The most important example of the use of such propaganda is the United States. (1973:75-76)

Such integration propaganda is not produced by the American government alone, of course. Perhaps the most persuasive and effective example of integration propaganda in the world is Hollywood cinema.<sup>73</sup> The “system of the suture”, as developed by Jacques-Alain Miller (1978), Jean-Pierre Oudart (1978) and Daniel Dayan (1974) among others, is a method of analysing classical Hollywood cinema using the principles of Lacanian psychoanalysis to reveal the way in which classical cinema embodies the hegemonic ideology of society at the level of filmic enunciation. They suggest that the viewer is “sutured” into the film, and thereby into that hegemonic ideology, in a process analogous to Althusserian interpellation. Dayan has given the name “the tutor-code of classical cinema” to this system, which is clearly an example of integration propaganda (in Ellul’s sense of the term) of a particularly effective kind.

The essential deficiency of Taylor’s approach is that he fails to make a distinction between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda, implicitly regarding all propaganda as integrative in its aim, as a sedative rather than a stimulant. Taylor mentions the distinction made by the Bolsheviks between “agitation” and “propaganda” and specifically states that he will not make such a distinction in his own analysis (1998:29).<sup>74</sup> While the distinction between agitation and propaganda is not precisely the same as the distinction between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda, Taylor’s claim that “to discuss each film in terms of whether it may be regarded as agitation or propaganda would be a worse than fruitless exercise, for it would actually obscure the real value of the film” (1998:29) is symptomatic of his general failure to distinguish between different modes of propaganda.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.5 Truth and falsehood in propaganda

Taylor's essentially negative attitude towards propaganda, regarding it as a "sedative" and implicitly as misleading or untruthful, seems to have negatively influenced the way he regards the films of Vertov in particular. For example, Taylor claims that there is a fundamental contradiction between Vertov's commitment to "catching life unawares" and his use of montage:

For Vertov, as for Eisenstein, montage was the key to the new reality, but its use was incompatible with his other fundamental belief in what he termed 'life caught unawares' [zhizn' vrasplokh] [...]. Reality in Vertov's formula was not then 'life caught unawares' or 'life as it is' but 'life as it ought to be', and that formula contained the germ of the distortions of Socialist Realism. (Taylor 1998:74)

Taylor seems to regard Vertov's use of montage as merely a means for him to distort reality; that is, he regards his films as "propaganda" in the negative sense of that word, as being essentially untruthful, and that this untruthfulness is essentially connected with his use of the montage method. In one rather limited sense of the word, "propaganda" can indeed be thought of as a reconstructed relation of events that deliberately fabricates or constructs a mythology.<sup>76</sup> Being based on fragmentation, isolation, displacement and juxtaposition, montage could be used to deform objective reality, deleting significant details and highlighting others. The montage method, by its nature, therefore lends itself easily to be used for propaganda purposes, and specifically to construct a mythology. The concept of deconstructing objective reality (by cutting up supposedly "objective" film shots) and re-constructing it into a new image is therefore the basis of a certain type of propaganda as well as the basis of montage. This is clearly the sense in which Taylor seems to regard Vertov's use of montage as presaging the "distortions" of socialist realism; that is, as presaging the *propaganda* of socialist realism, in the negative sense in which Taylor understands the concept of propaganda. It is this view which probably lies behind Taylor's somewhat contradictory evaluation of Vertov's film *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934):

as Vertov's biographer, Nikolai Abramov, has pointed out, it is also 'an outstanding work of Socialist Realism in the documentary cinema [...] a classic of Soviet cinema art'. But, despite the accuracy of these descriptions,

the film can still be regarded as a development of the experimental tradition of the 1920s. (1998:76)

Taylor's assertion seems on the face of it to be inconsistent. The two characteristics which Taylor ascribes to the film – as being “an outstanding work of Socialist Realism” and as being “a development of the experimental tradition of the 1920s” – are actually mutually contradictory. Taylor seems to have simply taken Abramov's judgement at face value, neglecting the political reasons behind it. Abramov *had* to claim *Three Songs of Lenin* as a classic of socialist realism in order to artistically rehabilitate Vertov in the Soviet Union of the 1960s – in doing this, he was (perhaps unconsciously) actually resurrecting Shumyatsky's somewhat eccentric view of Vertov's film when it was first released (Taylor and Christie 1988:365-67). However, as Richard Taylor points out elsewhere, “Vertov specifically denied that *Three Songs of Lenin* represented a rejection of the principles of the ‘Cine-Eye’ movement” (1998:225,n.13), whereas Shumyatsky explicitly (and Abramov implicitly) had claimed it *did* represent such a rejection. In fact, despite Shumyatsky's and Abramov's politically motivated attempts to claim otherwise, Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* is not a socialist realist film and does indeed represent a continuation of the principles of the Cine-Eye movement of the 1920s. Far from “presaging the distortions of Socialist Realism”, Vertov was to stubbornly refuse to compromise his radical film-making principles to conform to the strictures of socialist realism in the 1930s, a decision which was to ruin his career.

Vertov's use of montage, by his own account, was therefore not an attempt to distort reality but an attempt to better reveal it. Vertov believed, as a Marxist, that the surface appearance of reality can be misleading. To simply present that surface reality without first interpreting and rearranging it to reveal its hidden meanings would be to become complicit in the mystification created by the operations of capitalism. As Vertov himself asserted,

it is not enough just to film bits of truth. These bits must be organized in order to produce a truth of the whole. And this task is no less difficult, perhaps even more difficult, than the filming of the individual bits of truth. (Vertov 1984:120)

Moreover, he emphasised that the complex editing of the montage method is required precisely in order to *avoid* distorting reality in the mind of the audience: “The elimination of falsity, the achievement of that sincerity and clarity

noted by critics in *Three Songs of Lenin* required exceptionally complex editing” (1984:122). Taylor himself even seems to accept this idea:

Vertov’s early feature films [...] while consisting of film material of ‘life caught unawares’, are none the less *organised through montage* and it is this organisation that gives them rhythm, direction and, indeed, coherence. Life may have been caught unawares, but the director is concerned to make life more aware of itself. (Taylor 1998:75)

“[T]o make life more aware of itself” is a good way of describing what Vertov was aspiring to achieve – to raise the political and social consciousness of the audience by confronting them with life itself, with all its normally hidden meanings and connections revealed through montage.

However, it must be noted that Vertov himself was not above mixing actuality footage and visually staged scenes in order to make his political rhetoric more effective. For example, in *Kinopravda No. 8*, which deals with the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Vertov actually appears in the film in the role of a tram passenger, an “ordinary” member of the Soviet public, who buys a copy of a newspaper containing the trial’s verdict. Vertov’s brother, Mikhail Kaufman, also plays a member of the public who buys a copy of the same newspaper and discusses the verdict with another “ordinary” Soviet citizen who is actually Ivan Beliakov, a member of the film crew.<sup>77</sup> They even make a bet with each other as to whether the defendants will be shot or merely imprisoned, and the film ends with the “joke” that some are shot and others are spared, hence neither of the “bystanders” wins the bet. Vertov was clearly trying to introduce an element of suspense into what was actually a foregone conclusion – the guilty verdict and the death sentences for the majority of the accused – by deliberately misleading the audience. Such examples, while rare, certainly do exist in Vertov’s documentary films, and indicate that his desire to achieve a powerful rhetorical effect was so strong that it could sometimes override his usual obsession with documentary truthfulness in cinema as the antidote to the “poison” of staged fictional films. Vertov’s aspiration, however, always remained the same – he clearly believed that by staging some elements in *Kinopravda No. 8*, he was thereby helping the audience to understand a higher political truth: that the Socialist Revolutionaries were a danger to the Soviet government and therefore to the working class of the Soviet Union and had to be severely punished.<sup>78</sup>



Vertov's aspiration to capture and preserve factual truthfulness in his films, while sometimes honoured in the breach rather than the observance, contrasts with the attitude of Eisenstein towards the issue of factual truthfulness. The many elements in *October* in which Eisenstein departs from the historical record were particularly galling for Vertov, and for the LEF critics who supported Vertov's documentarist approach. In particular, the portrayal of Lenin by an (untrained) actor, Vasili Nikandrov, rather than purely through newsreel footage of the real Lenin aroused particular anger among the LEF critics, including Mayakovsky. Even more galling for them, if they had only known it at the time, would have been the way in which *October* actually came to displace the historical record of the October Revolution in the popular memory. As Richard Taylor has said,

Ironically enough, the very absence of documentary material [...] meant that subsequent historians and film-makers have turned to *October* as their source material, and Eisenstein's fictional re-creation of reality has, because of its verisimilitude, acquired the legitimacy of authentic documentary footage. That is a measure of its success as a propaganda film. (1998:64)

Despite his occasional use of such subterfuge himself, Vertov detested the way in which the audience's perception of historical reality itself could be distorted by this sort of mixing of documentary and newsreel techniques with fictional modes of film-making. This "contamination" of the historical record by fictionalised inventions epitomises the danger which Vertov saw in any hybrid or "mediating" form of cinema which attempted to mix the documentarist and fictional modes of film-making, as Eisenstein attempted to do in his earliest films (Vertov 1984:58). Vertov believed that propaganda must be truthful to the facts of reality, whereas Eisenstein believed that a higher truth than mere facts might be better served by fiction. This attitude is epitomised by an incident which Eisenstein himself recorded, in which the memory of a real event was distorted by his own fictional recreation of it: just after *Potemkin* had been released, Eisenstein received a letter from one of the 1905 mutineers who signed himself as "one of those under the tarpaulin". In actual fact, Eisenstein had invented the idea of the tarpaulin being placed *over* rather than under the condemned sailors, which was the normal practice to prevent their blood from staining the ship's clean deck (Eisenstein 1991:51). His invention had proved so powerful that even one of the veterans of

the 1905 mutiny on the Battleship *Potemkin* itself remembered the event the way Eisenstein had invented it rather than the way he had actually experienced it.<sup>79</sup>

This incident is symptomatic of a fundamental difference between the ways in which Eisenstein and Pudovkin on the one hand and Vertov on the other used propaganda, a difference which lay in their view of the appropriate relationship between the propagandist and the propagandee, the film-maker and his audience. Eisenstein's approach was that a film should communicate the propagandist's message as clearly as possible, and that the audience's role was to be an unfree (though not passive) receiver of that message. The audience was unfree in the sense that they could not invent their own meaning for the film; the director, as a creative artist, aimed to transfer the unique meaning of his film as accurately as possible into the audience's psyche. The audience was not passive in the sense that they had to do work in order to recreate that unique meaning of the montage film. In fact, Eisenstein's ideal was for the audience to experience the director's vision in precisely the same way in which he himself had first experienced it; that is, the spectator would replicate the director's creative thought processes. As Eisenstein put it,

The spectator is forced to follow the same creative path that the author followed when creating the image. The spectator does not only see the depicted elements of the work; he also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and formation of the image in the same way that the author experienced it. (Eisenstein 1991:309)

This required an essentially unfree but active spectator. Eisenstein used a vivid metaphor to describe this process: "a work of art [...] is first and foremost a tractor ploughing over the audience's psyche in a particular class context" (Eisenstein 1988:62). Eisenstein *imposes* his truth on the audience, even on those members of the audience who actually *know better*, such as the *Potemkin* mutineer. Vertov's approach was different, so different in fact that Eisenstein dismissed it as a form of "primitive Impressionism" and described Vertov's use of montage as being like "a pointillist painting" (1988:62). To better understand this distinction between the approach towards propaganda taken by Eisenstein and Pudovkin and that taken by Vertov, it is helpful to make a further distinction between two different modes of propaganda: vertical propaganda and horizontal propaganda.

Ellul was one of the first to make such a distinction, and he has described vertical propaganda in the following terms:

Classic propaganda, as one usually thinks of it, is a vertical propaganda – in the sense that it is made by a leader, a technician, a political or religious head who acts from the superior position of his authority and seeks to influence the crowd below. Such propaganda comes from above. (1973:79-80)

He differentiates this from what he calls “horizontal propaganda”, which

can be called horizontal because it is made *inside* the group (not from the top), where, in principle, all individuals are equal and there is no leader. The individual makes contact with others at his own level rather than with a leader; such propaganda therefore always seeks “conscious adherence.” (1973:81)

Vertical propaganda is, of course, by far the oldest and is still the most widespread of the two. It is what is usually thought of when the term “propaganda” is used. Horizontal propaganda, on the other hand, is a much more recent development,<sup>80</sup> and tends to be both more difficult than vertical propaganda and more effective when successful. As Ellul puts it,

To produce “voluntary” rather than mechanical adherence, and to create a solution that is “found” by the individual rather than imposed from above, is indeed a very advanced method, much more effective and binding than the mechanical action of vertical propaganda. (1973:81-82)

The “condescension” towards the Soviet public which Kenez detects in the Bolshevik propagandists (1985:6-7) was a direct result of their overwhelming use of “vertical” propaganda, and is also present in their capitalist counterparts too, as Bernays approvingly noted: “Ours must be a leadership democracy administered by the intelligent minority who know how to regiment and guide the masses” (2005:127). This “condescension” is in fact an inevitable consequence of the act of creating “vertical” propaganda, in Ellul’s sense of the term. One of the reasons Vertov favoured “horizontal” propaganda was probably his wish to avoid this very problem.

It is clearly the case that Kuleshov, Eisenstein and Pudovkin used the methods of vertical propaganda. Eisenstein talked about “ploughing over the audience’s psyche” and of hitting them with his “kino-fist” (Eisenstein 1988:62,64), while Pudovkin affirmed the need “to force even people with opposing views to be disturbed, directly and against their will” (Pudovkin 2006:23) and asserted that

“[t]he director [...] despotically manipulate[s] the viewer’s attention. The viewer sees only what the director shows him; there is neither space nor time for reflection, doubt or criticism” (2006:35). Pudovkin even describes montage itself as being merely the means by which to achieve this despotic control over the viewer: “It must be remembered that montage is essentially the forcible manipulation of the viewer’s thoughts and associations” (2006:60). By contrast, Vertov’s use of propaganda was far less coercive and corresponded rather closely to Ellul’s definition of “horizontal propaganda”. Vertov outlined the procedure he expected the cinema worker-correspondents, the *kinoki*, to follow when creating their films in his ‘Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups’ (Vertov 1984:67-79), and he summarised it by asserting that

[t]his departure from authorship by one person or a group of persons to mass authorship will, in our view, accelerate the destruction of bourgeois, artistic cinema and its attributes: the poser-actor, fairy-tale script, those costly toys – sets, and the director-high priest. (1984:71)

Vertov clearly expected the worker-correspondents of the the Kino-Eye Group to “create a solution that is ‘found’ by the individual rather than imposed from above”, as Ellul puts it. The distinction between the producers and the consumers of a film would be abolished – the cinema worker-correspondents would be both the producers and the consumers of the ideologically charged films created by the Kino-Eye Group, both the propagandists and the propagandees. One potential advantage of such horizontal propaganda would be that, as Kenez puts it, “there is no better way to convince people than to ask them to agitate” (1985:255).

### 3.6 The infectious art of montage cinema

By regarding propaganda as a complex phenomenon with various modalities and strategies rather than taking the simplistic, restricted definition usually employed by Western scholars, it is possible to classify the mode of propaganda being used by the Soviet montage directors in their classic films of the 1920s as transactive agitation propaganda. In the cases of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, this propaganda was also vertical, while in the case of Vertov it was (in aspiration at least) horizontal propaganda.

The powerful effectiveness of the montage films – their rhetorical power to move even audiences ideologically opposed to Communism – is undeniable. No

less a person than Krupskaya had endorsed *October* as a propaganda film in an article in *Pravda*: “Krupskaya, recalling that Lev Tolstoy ‘measured the artistic quality of a work by the extent to which it was capable of “infecting” others’,<sup>81</sup> argued that ‘There is no doubt that *October* is infectious”’ (1998:73), and as Taylor says, “it may well lay claim to having been the most effective propaganda film ever made” (1998:73). Taylor also describes how Vertov’s *Three Songs of Lenin*

was awarded a prize at the Venice Film Festival in the same year [1935]. It is rather surprising that a Soviet film praising Lenin and his achievements should have received such an accolade in fascist Italy and this is perhaps a tribute to the power of the film. (1998:84)

The critics at Venice were effectively endorsing Joseph Goebbels’ earlier praise for the rather different montage film *Potemkin*:

It is a fantastically well made film and displays considerable cinematic artistry. The decisive factor is its orientation. Someone with no firm ideological convictions could be turned into a Bolshevik by this film. This proves that a political outlook can be very well contained in a work of art and that even the worst outlook can be conveyed if this is done through the medium of an outstanding work of art. (Qtd. in Taylor 1998:144)

It is noteworthy that Goebbels emphasised that the powerful effectiveness of the film was the result of the unity of art and propaganda. The aim of the artistry of *Potemkin*, as of all the Soviet montage films, was to enhance the rhetorical effectiveness of the films in order to maximise their power as propaganda. This was “infectious” art indeed.

Hitler actually adopted a rather different approach than the one employed by Eisenstein and advocated by Goebbels:

The Führer preferred a complete separation of propaganda from art. (This separation was to serve Leni Riefenstahl well in the early post-war years, because she felt able to claim that *Triumph of the Will* [1935] was ‘art’ rather than ‘propaganda’.) (Taylor 1998:148)

The Soviet montage directors, by contrast, did not make this distinction; they saw no contradiction between art and propaganda. To them, all art was fundamentally tendentious, political at its very root. Even Eisenstein’s later films

were essentially propagandistic: “*Alexander Nevsky* was both conceived and executed primarily as a work of political propaganda; the artistic considerations were therefore secondary” (1998:86). This was of course consistent with the general approach of the Soviet government itself towards cinema even into the 1950s, as Taylor has noted:

Soviet film criticism had been moulded into part of the official propaganda apparatus. Its function was no longer criticism in the sense that a contemporary reader would understand the term but political education: the explanation and clarification of the propaganda message of a film. (1998:121)

But this was propaganda understood somewhat differently than the way the montage directors understood it in the 1920s. From the early 1930s, coinciding with the imposition of socialist realism as the only permissible method of artistic creation, there was an increasing mismatch between propaganda as the montage directors understood it, in their various ways, and propaganda as the Soviet government increasingly came to understand it. The montage film-makers and the Soviet government still shared the same view that cinema should serve primarily as a medium of propaganda, but their positions had diverged regarding the artistic techniques which were permissible to achieve that end. The range of possibilities for cinema as a medium of propaganda were to be narrowed in the 1930s to exclude montage as a permissible artistic method.

## Chapter 4

# Soviet Montage Cinema as Transactive Rhetoric

In any propaganda activity, the nature of the recipient of the propaganda message must be taken into consideration if the propaganda is to be persuasive. Rhetoric can be regarded as the art of persuasion; to examine Soviet montage cinema as a form of political rhetoric is therefore to examine the effect it has on its intended audience and to foreground considerations of the interaction between the filmic text and its spectator. The task faced by the Soviet montage film-makers was how to rhetorically persuade the individual members of a heterogeneous audience consisting of a mixture of social classes, ages and genders, of the truth of their political message in a predictable and therefore effective way. However, the heterogeneous nature of the cinema audience meant that the effect of a given stimulus or attraction was inherently unpredictable. In fact, the role of the spectator in the constitution of the rhetorical effect of the montage films is so problematic that a transactive model of their rhetorical effectivity is clearly necessary. The model must be transactive in the sense that it takes into account the subjectivity of the spectator in such a way that the two-way mutual interaction between the filmic text and its spectator could lead to transformations in the psyche of the spectator. In the following chapter, I shall suggest an appropriate model and apply it to analyse the rhetorical effectivity of the “Kuleshov Effect” montage experiment.

## 4.1 The “problem of the spectator” in Soviet montage cinema

In any propaganda activity, the addressee of the propaganda message must be considered if the propaganda is to be effective. Propaganda is usually targeted at specific groups, as Jowett and O'Donnell suggest:

A target audience is selected by a propagandist for its potential effectiveness. The propaganda message is aimed at the audience most likely to be useful to the propagandist if it responds favorably (1992:218).

Soviet montage cinema was no exception to that rule, as Eisenstein acknowledged in 1925 when he noted rather ruefully that

a particular stimulant is capable of provoking a particular reaction (effect) only from an audience of a particular class character. [...] [A]n audience of, let us say, metal workers and one of textile workers [...] will react quite differently and in different places to one and the same work. (Eisenstein 1988:67)

In fact, Soviet montage cinema was always aimed specifically at a proletarian audience; indeed, film montage itself had originated with the observational experiments carried out by Kuleshov and his co-workers when they toured the cinemas of Moscow in 1914-16 and observed which films the working-class audiences responded to enthusiastically and which they found boring (Kuleshov 1987:40). However, Soviet montage cinema also had universalist aspirations – the montage film-makers wanted to use the rhetorical power of montage cinema to influence everybody, no matter what their class background, in favour of the Communist cause. The montage directors' aim was, as Pudovkin put it, “to influence the masses, to convey a particular enthusiasm, and to force even people with opposing views to be disturbed, directly and against their will” (Pudovkin 2006:23). This rather contradictory position proved highly problematic, especially as the earliest model adopted by the montage film-makers to understand the effectivity of a montage film was the stimulus-response dyad of reflexology. This deterministic and crudely materialist model was championed in the early 1920s by Eisenstein in particular, who once wrote that “[h]ad I been more familiar with Ivan Pavlov's teaching, I would have called the ‘theory of the montage of attractions’ the ‘theory of artistic stimulants’” (Eisenstein 1970:17). Eisenstein,



in line with the mechanistic materialism in vogue in Soviet Russia at the time, attempted to connect a particular stimulant in a montage film with a particular response on the part of the audience through an iron law of causality; the work of Bekhterev and Pavlov was cited to lend scientific respectability to this model. Eisenstein even designated the “content” of a film to be no more or less than the “socially useful effect” it has on its audience using “suitably directed stimulants”:

Class character [*klassovost'*] emerges:

[...] *in the determination of the purpose of the film*: in the socially useful emotional and psychological effect that excites the audience and is composed of a chain of suitably directed stimulants. I call *this socially useful effect the content of the film*. (Eisenstein 1988:65; original emphasis)

The task which the montage film-makers faced was this: how to determine with any degree of certainty just what the “content” of a film actually was, and how to gain control over the supposed causal link between stimulus and reflex response in order to rhetorically persuade – to propagandise – every member of the audience in a predictable and therefore effective way. However, the heterogeneous nature of any audience, composed as it usually was of a mixture of social classes, ages and genders, meant that the effect of a given stimulus or attraction was inherently unpredictable.

Soviet montage cinema, considered as a form of propaganda, therefore seemed to require a particular kind of spectator to be effective: a spectator with the right sort of pre-existing class consciousness. This was in apparent contradiction with the aspiration of the montage film-makers to be able to convert even socially and ideologically hostile spectators to the Communist cause. The role of the spectator in the creation of the rhetorical effect of the filmic text was so obviously problematic that it seems clear that a transactive model of rhetoric is necessary in order to understand how Soviet montage cinema extorted, or at least attempted to exert, its rhetorical effects on its spectators.

The montage film-makers themselves were certainly aware of the need to consider the heterogeneous nature of the audience when calculating the effectiveness of the stimuli being used in their films. For example, Eisenstein found that bourgeois audiences responded differently to the slaughter of the bull at the end of *Strike* than did proletarian or peasant audiences. What was horrific and shocking for one type of spectator was merely part of workaday life for another:

Class-based ‘inevitability’ in matters of effectiveness is easily illustrated by the hilarious failure of one attraction that has had a very powerful influence on film-makers in the context of the worker audience. I have in mind the slaughter [sequence in *The Strike*]. Its exaggeratedly bloody associative effect on a certain stratum of the public is well enough known. [...] But on a worker audience the slaughter *did not have* a ‘bloody’ effect for the simple reason that the worker associates a bull’s blood above all with the processing plants near a slaughter-house! While on a peasant, used to slaughtering his own cattle, there will be no effect at all. (Eisenstein 1988:65; original emphasis)

Eisenstein confessed that

I was crushed by this defeat until I realised that the ‘slaughterhouse’ can also be perceived as something completely unlike a poetic commonplace, not as a metaphor. A slaughterhouse can also be [...] the place where meat is produced [...] [For the working class audience] upon the sight of these shots, the impression arose above all not of death and blood, but of beef and cutlets. (Qtd. in Nesbet 2007:48)

This meant that, if watched by the wrong type of spectator, there would be a breakdown of the expressive power of associational montage. The metaphoric “figure” created by montage would fall flat, would become merely a bare, literal fact and would lose all its power to agitate or persuade the spectator. In Marshall Alcorn’s terminology (Alcorn 1987), the process of projective idealisation would break down and would fail to generate meaning for the spectator out of the film’s signifiers. This is what could be called the “problem of the spectator” in Soviet montage cinema.

To be effective, propaganda must be able to produce calculable effects on its audience. Yet to achieve any degree of control over the effect of their films on the audience, it seemed that the montage film-makers might have to pre-select the audience to consist only of factory workers, or even only specific kinds of factory worker (“an audience of, let us say, metal workers and one of textile workers [...] will react quite differently and in different places to one and the same work” (Eisenstein 1988:65)). To be able to create the right sort of class consciousness in the spectator, it seemed that they first had to start with a spectator who *already possessed* the right sort of class consciousness. How was this circle to be squared? The unwelcome implication was that a separate work of propaganda might have

to be constructed for each and every one of the members of the audience; hardly an efficient use of the Soviet state’s limited resources.

One possible solution to the “problem of the spectator” would be to separate out the audience into sheep and goats, proletarians and bourgeois, and address only the proletarian spectators. This was certainly Vertov’s proposed solution:

Newsreels, the best examples of which are the issues of *Kinopravda*, are boycotted by film distributors, by the bourgeois and semibourgeois public. But this state of affairs has not forced us to accomodate ourselves to established, philistine taste. It has only led us to change our audience.

*Kinopravda* is being shown daily in many workers’ clubs in Moscow and the provinces, and with great success. And if the NEP audience prefers ‘love’ or ‘crime’ dramas that doesn’t mean that our works are unfit. It means the public is. (Vertov 1984:32)

However, this solution essentially meant abandoning any attempt to convert non-proletarian audiences to the Communist cause. The political rhetoric in Vertov’s films would therefore be preaching only to the already converted. This would actually be a useful activity in its own right, due to the importance of making the proletariat conscious of itself as a class *for* itself rather than merely a class *in* itself, to use Marxist terminology. However, the numerical weakness of the proletariat in Soviet society made this a dangerously restricted role for propaganda to play. A form of propaganda was required which could imbue peasant and even petty-bourgeois audiences with proletarian political values. In the Soviet Union of the 1920s, the proletarian class itself was rather small, and one of the main purposes of Soviet propaganda of the period was to strengthen proletarian class consciousness (which Vertov certainly tried to do) but also to expand the proletarian class by imparting a proletarian class consciousness to peasant and petty-bourgeois elements who were being proletarianised by the industrialisation of the Soviet economy (and this Vertov refused to do).

Eisenstein adopted a rather more ambitious attitude than Vertov towards the “problem of the spectator”. Despite a passing reference to a possible need to pre-select the audience in order for the “socially useful” effect of his films to work properly, Eisenstein ultimately thought of this effect as something which could actually *change* the political consciousness of the spectator rather than merely enhance it, as Vertov seemed to believe. After all, Eisenstein publically deplored “the sweet petty-bourgeois poison in the films of Mary Pickford that exploit and

train by systematically stimulating the remaining petty-bourgeois inclinations even among our healthy and progressive audiences” (Eisenstein 1988:66). If the wrong sort of film could have a negative effect on the mind of a proletarian spectator, then surely the right sort of film could have a *positive* effect even on a petty-bourgeois spectator? There was independent evidence that this might actually be possible, not the least of which was the enormous success of Eisenstein’s own film *Potemkin* in the West, even among bourgeois audiences. For example, Walter Benjamin described his own response as a bourgeois intellectual on seeing *Potemkin* for the first time:

The proletariat is the hero of those spaces to whose adventures, heart pounding, the bourgeois gives himself over in the cinema, because he must enjoy the ‘beautiful’ precisely where it speaks to him of the destruction of his class. (Qtd. in Hansen 1987:212)

Moreover, the artist Francis Bacon was so affected by the emotional power of the images of *Potemkin* that it transformed his whole approach to easel painting.<sup>82</sup> And of course the greatest example of films altering the consciousness of their audience is the so-called Dream Factory of Hollywood, which has successfully inculcated petty-bourgeois American values into the minds of its working-class audiences across the world (Bernays 2005:166).

In order to solve the “problem of the audience”, the montage directors therefore had to carry out a delicate balancing act: to use sophisticated rhetorical devices based on film montage and on some of the continuity devices of classical cinema to enhance or even to alter the consciousness of the spectator, while simultaneously taking into account the heterogeneous mix of pre-existing attitudes and political values which constituted the subjectivity of the particular members of the audience. Such a balancing act could only be accomplished by taking into account the subjectivity of the spectator when constructing a montage film, so as to obtain the maximal rhetorical effectiveness. The non-dialectical mechanistic materialism which dominated the discourse of “left-wing” avant-garde art in the Soviet Union in the 1920s was clearly inadequate for this task, as it could be the basis only of a one-way model of the interaction between the filmic text and the spectator. For example, in the reflexology which Eisenstein, and to a lesser extent Pudovkin,<sup>83</sup> used as a model for the influence exerted by a montage film on its audience, the stimulus-response dyad is linked by a non-dialectical one-way causality. The chain of “attractions” assembled according to Eisenstein’s montage

method would, in principle at least, cause a chain of specific and predictable reflex responses in the spectator in a deterministic and repeatable way, rather like a strict scientific experiment in Pavlov's famous "Tower of Silence".

Eisenstein later moved away from the crude mechanism of his position in the early 1920s and he gradually adopted a more dialectical approach to the construction of montage films. He later specifically criticised Kuleshov and Pudovkin for not moving beyond a mechanistic and constructive approach to film montage (Eisenstein 1988:144). This dialectical approach to the montage method meant that Eisenstein could now conceive of a two-way interaction between the filmic text and its spectator, in which their mutual interaction could lead to transformations in the psyche of the spectator which would in principle be far more complex than merely being "ploughed over" or being hit by Eisenstein's "kino-fist" (Eisenstein 1988:62,64), though he never specified a precise mechanism for this process.

A psychoanalytic mechanism by which these transformations might occur is that proposed by Marshall Alcorn to describe the two-way interaction between a literary text and its reader (Alcorn 1987). The essence of Alcorn's approach, expressed in cinematic terms, is that the film brings rhetorical pressure to bear on the spectator while the spectator simultaneously brings his or her "projective idealization" to bear on the filmic text. Alcorn describes this as a continuous, transactive process which opens the possibility of the interaction between the film and its viewer changing the viewer's psychic structures, which in turn will change the particular projective idealisations he or she brings to bear on the filmic text. The process will thereby have altered the spectator's "linguistic construction of the self", in Alcorn's words. Such a change in the spectator's "value structures" was precisely what the Soviet montage directors were hoping to achieve through the rhetorical power made available to them by the montage method.

## 4.2 Projective idealisation and transactive rhetoric

One of the fundamental claims of this thesis is that Soviet montage cinema was essentially a *rhetoric* of cinema rather than an aesthetic: it was a conscious attempt to use cinema as a medium for political persuasion, and the montage directors saw this as the primary function of their films. Eisenstein even called

the “socially useful effect” of his films their “content” (Eisenstein 1988:65). It is worth noting in this regard that Peter Bürger, in his seminal study of the theory of the avant-garde, actually denied that film montage is a specifically aesthetic technique: “In the film, the montage of images is the basic *technical procedure*. It is not a specifically artistic technique, but one that lies in the medium” (Bürger 1984:73; original emphasis). Of course it is true that he did not mean by this that film montage is a specifically rhetorical technique either, but rather that it is an inescapable part of the material basis of cinema as an artistic medium. Bürger gave an essentialist definition of film montage as a mere technical procedure which is invariably present in *all* films, whether realist or avant-garde, which meant that it was therefore of no relevance to a theory of the avant-garde. However, the *function* of a technical procedure, the use to which it is actually put, is highly significant. Although montage, in the sense of the cutting of the film stock, is indeed used in (almost) all films,<sup>84</sup> its function differs greatly depending on the type of film in which it is used. For example, in classical cinema “montage” (i.e. the technical procedure of cutting the film) is used to produce an effect of seamlessness, to suture the spectator into the filmic text; in Soviet montage cinema, by contrast, the same technical procedure is used to produce an effect of conflict and discontinuity. While Bürger’s assertion that film montage is a technical procedure rather than a specifically artistic technique may be true, film montage can and does serve a range of different and contradictory functions in different films, and it is the particular function a given technical procedure serves which determines the status of a film as avant-garde or realist, politically engaged or purely aesthetic. I would argue that the Soviet montage film-makers were using the “technical procedure” of film montage for essentially rhetorical rather than aesthetic purposes.

The status of Soviet montage cinema as a form of rhetoric has sometimes been asserted before; however, it is also important to ask the question, what does it actually *mean* to assert that Soviet film montage was a form of rhetoric? Rhetoric can be regarded as the art of persuasion; that is, the set of techniques required to construct effective discourses. To examine a film as a form of rhetoric is therefore to examine the effect it has on its intended audience, and the means by which it achieves that effect. To consider Soviet montage cinema as a form of rhetoric therefore has the effect of foregrounding considerations of the interaction between the filmic text and its spectator. In this respect, as I have already suggested, a

useful approach towards literary rhetoric has been outlined by Marshall Alcorn, who suggests that the interaction between the reader's "projective idealization" which they bring to bear on the text and the rhetorical forces which the text brings to bear on the reader creates a change in the reader's "value structures", an alteration in their "linguistic construction of the self", to use Alcorn's terminology.

The fact that Alcorn examines the process of "projective idealization" exclusively in relation to the literary text and that he describes the transformation this process evokes in the reader as changes to "the linguistic construction of the self" does not mean that the same model is not also applicable to the primarily visual medium of cinema. The montage directors themselves often wrote about montage as the "language" of cinema.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, in his analysis of the applicability of linguistic models to cinema, Christian Metz has concluded that

[t]he cinema is certainly not a language system (*langue*). It can, however, be considered as a *langue*, to the extent that it orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms [...]. Filmic manipulation transforms what might have been a mere visual transfer of reality into discourse. (1982a:105)

A film, though it might consist mostly or even entirely of images, can therefore contribute to "the linguistic construction of the self"<sup>86</sup> to the same extent, and in fundamentally the same way, as a literary text. Furthermore, the concept of a work of art as exerting rhetorical pressure on its reader or viewer is possibly even more appropriate when applied to cinema than to the printed text, as the rules of rhetoric were originally derived in the ancient world from the practice of aural and visual modes of communication rather than written ones. In fact, Alcorn's approach is applicable to any text which exerts a rhetorical pressure on its reader or viewer and which in turn receives their projective idealisations.

Alcorn summarises his approach as follows:

Texts are not purely the product of a reader's projection. Texts have particular properties of their own. These particular properties, however, do not exist as categories of referential meaning; they exist as something we might call rhetoric. Our discussion of the linguistic structure of the self encourages us to hypothesize a relation between the projective forces brought to bear upon the text by the reader and the rhetorical forces brought to bear upon the reader by the text. [...] Words in this manner absorb pro-

jective forces and deflect them, thereby exerting “rhetorical” pressure upon self-functions. (1987:147)

Alcorn’s model employs psychoanalysis, rhetoric and semiotics in order to understand the interaction between a literary text and its reader. The fact that the meaning of a literary text (or, by extension, a filmic text) is not an inherent property of the text itself, but is generated by the dialectical interaction between the text and its reader or spectator through a process of “projective idealization”, means that the texts achieve their meaning and signification by a process which can be regarded as rhetorical. As Alcorn puts it, “Texts are not blank screens reflecting the projections of a reader; textual signifiers *do* things to projections” (1987:142). He summarises the nature of the complex, transactive interaction between reader and text in terms of a particular kind of rhetoric:

Projective idealization is a meaning effect, a rhetorical effect, produced by an angle of vision. Projective idealization uses an angle of vision to produce a personal organization of the rhetorical effects of signifiers. (Alcorn 1987:154)

In other words, the subjectivity of the spectator constitutes the signification of the text while the text simultaneously constitutes the subjectivity of the reader. What Lapsley and Westlake say about film applies equally well to the literary text or to propaganda texts:

the subject is as much constituting as constituted because, according to Lacan, the subject halts the slide of the signifier, thereby becoming the producer as well as the product of meaning. [...] Meaning and subjectivity come into being together, each engendering the other in a process of endless dialectic. (Lapsley and Westlake 2006:53)

The meaning of the text is generated by this complex transactive process, which is itself essentially a rhetorical process.

This view of how meaning is generated when a reader meets a text, or a spectator meets a film, is of course very close to Roland Barthes’ concept of the “death of the Author” (1977:142-48), with the addition of a psychoanalytic interpretation of the actual process by which this occurs and an emphasis on the text or film as a form of rhetoric.<sup>87</sup> It should also be noted that this view of how the meaning of a text or film is generated effectively corresponds to the “open” form of a montage work as opposed to the “closed” form of an organic work of



art, as Peter Bürger defines them (1984:55-82), and further endorses the status of Soviet montage cinema as part of the historical avant-garde.

The meaning of a film is therefore not held within it as a pre-existing content to which the spectator has only to gain access through a transparent form in order to “understand” the film; rather, there is a unity of form and content (something which all the montage directors emphasised they were striving to achieve) in which the meaning of a film is generated by the dialectical interaction between film and spectator. As Alcorn puts it,

We normally assume rhetoric is a force in language that manipulates emotion in humans. [...] Rhetoric, then, is not *in* language. It is *in* selves. It is a force in the linguistic construction of the self. (1987:148)

This is essentially a psychoanalytic definition of rhetoric, as Alcorn makes clear: “Rhetoric designates the forces in the linguistic construction of the self that structure affect” (1987:148). In this respect, Alcorn’s approach therefore represents a psychoanalytic interpretation of the interaction between reader and literary text, or spectator and filmic text. In fact, the use of psychoanalysis to understand the means by which montage cinema achieves its effects has a precedent in Eisenstein’s own interest in the work of Freud.<sup>88</sup> Alcorn’s concept of the “projective idealization” directed by the reader at the text and the way in which it is modified by the rhetorical pressures exerted by the literary text on the reader suggests a definite psychoanalytic mechanism by which rhetoric – the art of persuasion – can stimulate thought rather than suppress it, by inducing the reader to recognise “the authority of the signifiers” of the filmic text and thereby change his or her value structures. This sort of rhetorical pressure can be regarded as creating the kind of propaganda called for by Brecht in 1935: “Propaganda that stimulates thinking, in no matter what field, is useful to the cause of the oppressed” (Brecht 1966:146).

The main advantage of Alcorn’s approach as a model of the interaction between reader and text is that it recognises the transactive, dialectical interaction between text and reader or film and spectator – the rhetorical effect of the text is not merely imposed on the passively receptive reader, but is the result of a dynamic interaction. This reinstates political intervention as being both possible and desirable for the reader or spectator, since the meaning of the text or film is no longer inescapably fixed by the writer or film-maker, nor, conversely, can an arbitrary meaning simply be imposed by the reader or spectator. Rather, the

meaning is generated by the dynamic interaction between reader and text, which is analogous to the dialectical interaction between the individual and material reality to which Marxism gives the name “praxis”. The reader or spectator is neither passive nor arbitrarily free, but is engaged with reality in a creative, interactive way. In this regard, Alcorn has suggested that personal and cultural change in general may be produced by the same sort of psychoanalytic processes. As he says,

since idealizing projection (the very mode of subjectivity that processes and digests textuality) is influenced through an upwelling of primary process affect, then personal change and cultural change might well be a function of idealist projection operating upon material signifiers. (1987:149-50)

Alcorn also claims that “[o]ften, change begins as a revolutionary rhetorical response to a culturally prescribed rhetorical effect” (1987:150), an assertion which the Soviet montage film-makers would undoubtedly have endorsed. Indeed, they saw the main function of their montage films as being precisely to provoke such social and political change by stimulating a revolutionary rhetorical response in their audience. Alcorn’s psychoanalytic model of how this rhetorical response is stimulated could therefore provide a new perspective on, for example, Eisenstein’s concept of “pathos” (which Dana Polan has defined as an “empathic projection by the perceiver of the film”) by providing a mechanism by which such projections could be evoked and then modified by the rhetorical pressures exerted by the filmic text itself.

However, it might be objected that the active participation of the reader or spectator in generating the meaning of a literary or filmic text seems to be at odds with some of the stated aims of the montage directors themselves. Eisenstein in particular seemed keen to suppress individual subjective interpretations of the meaning of his films; he talked about using his “kino-fist” to strike the audience, to force them to think in a certain way (Eisenstein 1988:64). He even asserted that in a montage film “[t]he spectator is forced to follow the same creative path that the author followed when creating the image” (1991:309). But it is also the case that he noted that different audiences will respond in different ways to the same montage trope (for example, the killing of the bull in *Strike*), depending on their class origin and their life experiences (1988:65), and therefore implicitly recognised the active role of the spectator in generating the meaning of such

montage tropes. It is therefore surely the case even for Eisenstein's films that, in Alcorn's words,

reading is not a simple process whereby the unity of a subject responds to the unity of a text. Instead, reading reflects the rhetorical friction produced at the intersection between the self (as a plurality of textual codes) encountering the orienting and disorienting "order" of another plurality of codes (the text). (1987:151)

Indeed, Marc Scheurers has noted that "essential to a montage construction is *what is not told*, but must be revealed by the interpretative activity of the spectator or reader" (Schreurs 1989:172).

Alcorn suggests that his approach could help to solve the same type of problems which Lapsley and Westlake claim afflicts film theory in general:

Without [give-and-take between spectator and film], the subject can only be thought of as either inescapably determined by the text or as voluntaristically creating meanings. [...] In each case political intervention becomes a redundancy, in the one because meanings are unalterably fixed, in the other because they are already fluid. Instead the relation of subject and text is a movement of exchange: 'the subject makes the meanings the film makes for it, is the turn of the film as discourse'.<sup>89</sup> (2006:54)

However, Lapsley and Westlake also raise an important issue which Alcorn largely ignores: the implications of the model of the interaction between spectator and film (or reader and text) for the possibility of political intervention in the real world. This is especially significant for Soviet montage cinema, which was overtly political in nature. The absence of a transactive model of the way that film – or indeed propaganda in general – exerts its rhetorical pressure on the spectator will lead to a one-sided view of the effect such a film or propaganda will have on its audience. For example, Kenz implicitly portrays the Soviet people as passive receptacles for Soviet propaganda when he writes that

[f]irst the people came to speak a strange idiom and adopt the behavior patterns expected of them, and only then did the inherent ideological message seep in. The process of convincing proceeded not from inside out but from outside in. That is, people came to behave properly, from the point of view of the regime, not because they believed its slogans but because by repeating the slogans they gradually acquired a "proper consciousness." (1985:255)

Kenez's account neglects the complex interaction going on between the propaganda text and the propagandee, and offers a rather impoverished description of the way in which propaganda actually operated in the Soviet Union. The transformation in the consciousness of the Soviet people did not merely proceed "from outside in", as Kenez states, but was an internal transformation of their value structures as a result of their "projective idealizations" being modified by the rhetorical pressures from the propaganda. According to Alcorn's model, this is not a passive process at all, but involves the active participation of the propagandee. The portrayal of the propagandee as being inescapably determined by the propaganda text is also to be found in Taylor's analysis of some Soviet films as works of propaganda (1998). In both Kenez's and Taylor's analyses, the spectator of a film is portrayed as being passive and the filmic text as constituting the subjectivity of the spectator in a deterministic one-way process rather than also having its own meanings at least partially constituted by the spectator him- or herself in a transactive process. The result is that, as Lapsley and Westlake suggest, the spectator is nullified as a political subject; political intervention becomes a redundancy because the meanings of the filmic text are unalterably fixed and cannot be constituted or challenged by the spectator.

Alcorn's approach, on the contrary, emphasises the fact that the meaning of a literary text (or, by extension, a filmic text) is created by a transactive process involving both the reader and the literary text, the spectator and the filmic text, or the propagandee and the propaganda text. This restores the possibility of political agency to the spectator, since the functioning of a film as propaganda is then an interactive process requiring the co-operation of the spectator to produce the meaning of its political discourse. Many analysts of propaganda have previously emphasised the importance of the mutual interaction between the propaganda text and its audience. For example, Jowett and O'Donnell have described how "the predispositions of the audience are canalized by the propaganda message, having the effect of resonance" (1992:269). This, in broad outline at least, echoes Alcorn's model of the interaction of the reader with a literary text, and is analogous to Vertov's claim that his own montage films enabled their viewers to accomplish "the communist decoding of the world" (Vertov 1984:42). Vertov was implying that the practice gained by the spectator in decoding his films – which, after all, he believed to have captured "life as it is" – could be directly transferred to the spectator's own everyday experience, enabling him or

her to subject real, everyday life itself to a similar “communist decoding”, to an ideological reading of reality itself. As Peter Wollen puts it,

just as the text, by introducing its own decoding procedures, interrogates itself, so the reader too must interrogate himself, puncture the bubble of his consciousness and introduce into it the rifts, contradictions and questions which are the problematic of the text.

The text then becomes the location of thought, rather than the mind. The text is the factory where thought is at work, rather than the transport system which conveys the finished product. (1997:163-64)

It is the work of Vertov more than that of any other of the Soviet montage directors which comes closest to achieving this aim. Vertov’s films are propaganda films, but a form of propaganda which encourages and requires the active participation of the spectator in constituting the meaning of the filmic text, or “decoding” the text as Vertov himself put it. Both Eisenstein and Pudovkin, by contrast, tended to be far more manipulative of the spectator and (rightly or wrongly) regarded the text of their films as having a unique meaning which pre-exists the viewing of the film, and which the spectator would then read more or less accurately but could not constitute or modify (Eisenstein 1988:64 and 1991:309, Pudovkin 2006:16,23,35). The difference between Eisenstein and Pudovkin on the one hand, and Vertov on the other, can be encapsulated by labelling Eisenstein’s and Pudovkin’s films as “vertical propaganda” and Vertov’s films as “horizontal propaganda”, as I have already indicated. The fact that Vertov made documentary films, that he went out into the world to see what was there and to capture it on film, is an important aspect of the “horizontal” nature of his propaganda film-making. By not staging the profilmic material of his films and by not writing a scenario before filming began, Vertov was choosing not to impose a pre-existing meaning on his filmic text but to reveal the meanings hidden behind the surface appearances of reality. The spectator would then be an active participant in generating those meanings by consciously decoding Vertov’s filmic text in accordance with Communist ideology. This required Vertov to foreground those codes, which meant foregrounding the enunciation of his films rather than trying to conceal it, as classical cinema generally aims to do. Eisenstein and Pudovkin were far more willing to impose pre-existing meanings onto the spectator, and were therefore quite prepared to stage the profilmic material of their films in order to obtain greater control over it.

In his model of the interaction between reader and literary text, Alcorn uses the Freudian psychoanalytic concept of “projection”.<sup>90</sup> The projective forces described by Alcorn are a modified form of the “primitive mechanism” described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*:

The projection outwards of internal perceptions is a primitive mechanism, to which, for instance, our sense perceptions are subject and which therefore normally plays a very large part in determining the form taken by our external world. [...] [I]nternal perceptions of emotional and intellectual processes can be projected outwards in the same way as sense perceptions; they are thus employed for building up the external world, though they should by rights remain part of the *internal* world [...]. (Freud 1989:81)

However, whereas Freud defined projection to be a one-way process, it is important to note that the projection which Alcorn ascribes to the reader is a two-way process, as Alcorn himself emphasises: “Projective idealization refers to the process by which material from the internal world encounters material in the external world and becomes modified by it” (1987:146). This means that, unlike Freudian projection, “projective idealization” is not an entirely subjective process but is modified by the objective nature of the text or film itself (what Alcorn refers to as the “authority of the signifier”). Alcorn makes a distinction between the entirely subjective form of projection (which he calls “projective occlusion” and which is approximately what Freud meant by “projection”), which is a one-way imposition of meaning onto the text by the reader, and a form of projection which is not completely subjective (which he calls “projective idealization”), which is a two-way, transactive process:

Unfortunately, the term “projection” can refer to two distinctly different kinds of activity. On the one hand, projection can refer to a subjective replacing or deleting of an objectively present signifier (an avoidance of the perceptible features of the object). On the other hand, projection can refer to the subjective interpreting and contextualizing of signifiers actually encountered. For clarity, I will term the projective covering up of the text “projective occlusion,” and the reworking of signification “projective idealization.” (1987:145)

His introduction of an element of reciprocity into the Freudian concept of projection is what enables the encounter between the reader and the literary text,

or the spectator and the film, to trigger change in the reader or spectator's value structures or sense of self. Alcorn makes this clear when he writes that

[p]rojective occlusion is not a personal reworking of signifiers already present in the text but an avoidance of signifiers, especially an avoidance of signifiers that challenge one's values and sense of self. Projective idealization encounters possibilities for meaning that it organizes and reworks; projective occlusion denies the presence of some potential meaning that needs to be taken into account. (1987:146)

The concept of "projective occlusion" could also shed some light on the "problem of the spectator" in Soviet montage cinema which I have already briefly described, namely the idea that the rhetorical effect of a montage film would vary in an unpredictable way, depending on the class background of the particular spectator of that film. For example, as Eisenstein stated in 1924,

[i]t is quite clear that for a worker and a former cavalry officer the chain of associations set off by seeing a meeting broken up and the corresponding emotional effect in contrast to the material which frames this incident, will be somewhat different. (Eisenstein 1988:41-42)

For a spectator with a hostile class consciousness, such as a former Tsarist cavalry officer, class prejudices or traditional narrative expectations might be so strong that projective occlusion would prevent the montage film from achieving its intended effect on the consciousness of that spectator. The rhetorical pressure of the film would be nullified by the spectator's subjective occlusion of the filmic text. This problem was to have significant consequences for Soviet montage cinema as a viable artistic movement. The perceived difficulty of the montage films for Soviet audiences was one of the main reasons why the Soviet government effectively banned montage cinema in the 1930s in favour of socialist realism, in order to create a cinema which would be easily comprehensible to the masses and could therefore be more effective as a propaganda weapon. However, the relative difficulty of the montage films should not be exaggerated. *Potemkin*, for example, was a box-office hit in the Soviet Union in 1926, despite possible official massaging of the figures (Youngblood 1992:5), and was apparently understood (or at least enjoyed) by millions of people around the world. The same can be said for the films of Pudovkin and Vertov, which were far from being box-office disasters. Clearly, in Alcorn's terms, projective idealisation rather than merely projective occlusion is at work for most spectators of montage films.

However, the concept of “projective occlusion” can still provide a useful way of understanding the sense of confusion and bafflement with which audiences often met the montage films of Eisenstein or Vertov in particular, when these films were first screened in the Soviet Union. Pudovkin’s films, being more closely modelled on the classical style, tended to be easier for audiences to comprehend since they already possessed a repertoire of techniques for “reading” such filmic texts. But despite this, even Pudovkin encountered the problem of audiences failing to comprehend his films. For example, his (for him) daringly experimental film *Life is Very Good* (1930) was received with such bewilderment on the part of its audience at a test screening that Pudovkin was forced to substantially rework the film and release it two years later as *A Simple Case* (1932).<sup>91</sup> In terms of Alcorn’s concept of “projective occlusion”, it is possible that audiences, coming to these films with certain cultural and cinematic expectations, were projecting those expectations onto the montage films and the resulting mismatch between the projected expectations and the actual signifiers of the filmic texts themselves generated a sense of cognitive dissonance and confusion.

Indeed, Vertov seems to have actually exploited the mismatch between the audience’s narrative expectations of a movie and the actual signifiers of his film *The Man with a Movie Camera* by deliberately triggering and then frustrating these narrative expectations. Vertov was, in effect, absorbing the spectator’s projective forces and deflecting them towards political ends. By frustrating the spectator’s projected narrative expectations, Vertov was using his film to evoke and then interrupt the spectator’s usual habits of reading a commercial film in the classical style to obtain what Vertov regarded as frivolous pleasure (cinema as an “opium of the people”) in order to divert those habits of reading a film towards a political reading of the real world. The overtly *political* nature of such a reading of the world was an essential aspect of Vertov’s formal techniques. This is why I regard Graham Roberts as being profoundly mistaken when he claims *The Man with a Movie Camera* to be essentially a self-reflexive Modernist film and to be “practically useless as a documentary of a historical or propagandist nature” (Roberts 1999:86). On the contrary, I would suggest that its self-reflexive Modernism is *precisely* what gives the film its political and ideological power. Vertov’s method of achieving this was to use the images and “intervals” of his film in the same way that Alcorn claims that words function in a literary text: “Words in this manner absorb projective forces and deflect them, thereby exerting “rhetor-



ical” pressure upon self-functions” (1987:147). Williams (1979) has analysed the formal methods by which Vertov’s film *The Man with a Movie Camera*

perverts one type of coding to substitute another: instead of a narrative development, causally orientated, we are presented a highly unified series but in which unification is ‘logical’ only in terms of abstract relationships (1979:13)

and he has claimed that Vertov’s formal strategy throughout the film is “to present the possibility of one type of organizational logic [i.e. narrative] while denying it” (1979:13). While Williams analyses Vertov’s strategy within a formalist framework, it might be illuminating to examine it instead using Alcorn’s model. Such an analysis would have the effect of foregrounding the interaction between the spectator and the filmic text rather than focusing solely on the text itself, and would perhaps give more insight into the psychoanalytic mechanisms by which Vertov’s rhetorical strategy operates on the spectator.

The concept of “projective idealization” developed by Alcorn allows the active participation of the spectator in the rhetorical process to be factored into the analysis of montage cinema as a form of rhetoric – the rhetoric is not something done *to* a passive spectator by a montage film, but demands their active, conscious participation.<sup>92</sup> Alcorn’s approach emphasises the importance of a film’s enunciation, its rhetoric. The fiction of the film is spoken, and its meaning is created, by a transactive process between the spectator and the filmic text. It also has the benefit of helping to illuminate the nature of Soviet montage cinema as a form of propaganda, since rhetorical strategies are an important element in any propaganda medium. I shall proceed to investigate the appropriateness of this approach by applying it to the Kuleshov Effect, the canonical example of early Soviet film montage. It could then be applied as a general method of analysing other montage tropes used in the films of other montage directors. Since Soviet montage cinema is part of the historical avant-garde, this approach might also have the potential to be a move towards providing the kind of functional rather than normative analysis of the avant-garde called for by Peter Bürger; that is, an analysis of the social and political effect of an artwork rather than merely of a set of aesthetic norms (Bürger 1984:87).

## 4.3 The Kuleshov Effect and “projective idealization”

The “Kuleshov Effect” experiment, sometimes also known as the “Mozzhukhin experiment”, is the canonical example of film montage;<sup>93</sup> if there was a founding moment of Soviet film montage, it was probably this. However, despite this experiment being the one for which Kuleshov is best remembered and the one which demonstrated the cinematic effect to which his name has ever after been attached, Kuleshov himself actually regarded his other montage experiments as being more significant. Even as late as 1965 he asserted that “I think that the experiments carried out subsequently in collaboration with my students were much more interesting” (Kuleshov 1973:70).<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, despite its fame, a strange aura of uncertainty and ambiguity has gathered around the Kuleshov Effect experiment: the film footage itself no longer survives, yet stills are sometimes published purporting to be from Kuleshov’s actual experiment; it is often claimed that the film was shown to a random audience and their reactions scientifically observed, yet it has also been suggested that Kuleshov assembled the film experiment and watched it with just a few colleagues who gave their opinion as to its effect on them. Even the objective validity of the Kuleshov Effect itself has been questioned (Aumont 1986, Prince and Hensley 1992). Dana Polan has actually suggested that

[t]o a large degree, the very discrepancies in the available historical reports of Kuleshov’s experiments may be part of the appeal of a reference to Kuleshov in writing on film. The ‘Kuleshov Effect’ becomes the film theorist’s equivalent of a palimpsest, an ink-blot test out of which one can read almost any aesthetic position. (1986:98)

Part of the reason for this ambiguity is undoubtedly the lack of scientific rigor in Kuleshov’s montage experiments, despite his scientific aspirations. As Amy Sargeant has noted, Kuleshov’s montage experiments of the early 1920s “are unsatisfactory by any scientific criteria” (2000:8). Stephen Prince and Wayne E. Hensley list some of Kuleshov’s scientific deficiencies:

For such a seminal and basically uncontested study, there is virtually no information available about Kuleshov’s actual method and procedure. Did he, for example, interview the subjects individually or in a group? What did he tell them beforehand about the purpose of the presentation? What,

if anything, did he tell them about the nature of film editing or montage? What was the frequency of outlier opinions, e.g., people who did *not* think Mozhukin was saddened by the dead woman? Published accounts suggest the responses were uniform. Was this so? Unfortunately, we do not know the answers to any of these questions. (1992:65)

It is even unclear when Kuleshov carried out the experiment, or the precise conditions under which it was carried out. In the late 1960s, Kuleshov gave the fullest available account of his most famous experiment:

It was about that time [i.e. around 1920] that I made an editing experiment. Only when I went to Paris in 1962 did I learn that my experiment was known abroad as the “Kuleshov effect”. [...]

Now here is what the “effect” is all about.

I alternated the same shot, a close-up of the actor Mozhukhin, with different other shots (a plate of soup, a girl, a child’s coffin, etc.). When juxtaposed by montage, the shots acquired different meanings. The emotions of the man on the screen became different. Two shots gave rise to a third notion, a new image that neither of them contained: a different third. I was stunned. I saw the great power of montage. Here was the pivot, the essential basis of any film! At the director’s will montage infused a different meaning into the content. That was my conclusion. (Kuleshov 1987:211)

A shorter description in an interview given in 1965 contains details which contradict this account somewhat:

The shot of Mozhukhin, always identical, was variously juxtaposed – now with a plate of soup, now with images suggesting some erotic situation. I recall that there was also a montage with a child’s coffin. In short, all sorts of combinations. Unhappily no stills or notes have been preserved. The pictures that have been published abroad, as for instance in an issue of *Cinéma pratique* in 1962, are not mine at all. Mine were not kept. (Kuleshov 1973:70)

The standard description of the experiment has it that the film was shown to an audience who believed that the expression on Mozhukhin’s face was different each time he appeared, depending on whether he was “looking at” the plate of soup, the girl, or the child’s coffin and “showing” an expression of hunger, desire or grief respectively, when in actuality the footage of Mozhukhin was absolutely

identical every time it appeared. Pudovkin (who later claimed to have been the co-creator of the experiment)<sup>95</sup> described in 1929 how

[t]he audience raved about the actor's refined acting. They pointed out his weighty pensiveness over the forgotten soup. They were touched by the profound sorrow in his eyes as he looked upon the dead woman, and admired the light, happy smile with which he feasted his eyes on the girl at play. But we knew that in all three cases the face was exactly the same. Such is the powerful effect of montage. (Pudovkin 2006:160)

This response of the audience to a certain kind of film montage is known as the “Kuleshov Effect”.

The experiment itself was created by simply assembling fragments from copies of old Tsarist films. When Kuleshov created his experiment, then, he was not shooting any new material but was merely assembling ready-made fragments; in this respect, it was a true “montage” experiment. This is consistent with Kuleshov's stated view that it is not the material out of which a film is constructed which is important, but the way that the material is assembled. Indeed, by incorporating found footage of a Tsarist matinee idol in his montage experiment, Kuleshov was effectively detaching the image from the object it claimed to represent in order to juxtapose it with other images to achieve new effects. As Vance Kepley has put it, describing another of Kuleshov's montage experiments,

The image's new relationship with contiguous images in an editing sequence displaced its association with its original referent. Kuleshov's shot of the White House in his ‘Fabricated Landscape’ sequence no longer referred innocently to a building in Washington, but to a building that existed in a fictional landscape in the minidiagnosis of the sequence. (1992:139)

This is, of course, an essentially formalist position: images have more in common with other images than they do with any object being represented. It is not the content of those images which is important, but their combination with each other. This partial detachment of signifiers from their signifieds<sup>96</sup> is characteristic of montage cinema, and was regarded by Kazimir Malevich as symptomatic of the tendency for montage cinema to become the sort of “non-objective” cinema of which he approved.<sup>97</sup>

Mozzhukhin himself had been the leading romantic matinee idol of Tsarist cinema, and had fled Russia following the October Revolution. The audience

would therefore have been very familiar with the sight of Mozzhukhin’s face on a cinema screen, and Kuleshov and Pudovkin (who assisted Kuleshov in conducting the experiment) deliberately tried to select footage of Mozzhukhin from old Tsarist film footage in which his face was emotionally neutral and expressionless. In Pudovkin’s words, “We took from some film or other a close-up of the well-known Russian actor Mosjoukine [Mozzhukhin]. We deliberately chose a close-up that was static and did not express any feeling at all” (Pudovkin 2006:160). They thereby sought to minimise any possible emotional response which the material *in itself* could possibly evoke from the audience. It is worth noting in this regard that Mozzhukhin himself was famous in Tsarist times for his static facial expression. One critic in 1916 stated that “[e]ach and every one of our best film actors has his or her own *style* of mime: Mosjoukine has his steely hypnotised look” (Tsivian 1994:15; original emphasis). Both Kuleshov and Pudovkin would doubtless have been aware of Mozzhukhin’s famous “steely hypnotised look” and this may have motivated their selection of his face rather than that of some other actor for their experiment. However, Sargeant has suggested that Mozzhukhin’s expression “seems remote from the use of blank models”, and that Mozzhukhin was well-known in Tsarist cinema “for his ‘full’ style, his formidable gaze and mesmerising intensity, the concentrated static internalisation of emotion” (Sargeant 2000:9). While this suggests that Prince and Hensley are correct in their speculation that Mozzhukhin’s expression may have been ambiguous rather than actually blank, the essential point is that Mozzhukhin’s famous “stare” was regarded even in Tsarist times as inducing the audience to project emotion onto it. Although they do not explicitly say so, Kuleshov and Pudovkin were almost certainly consciously using this (at the time) well-known fact as the basis of their experiment.

The material itself therefore had little emotional affect for the audience; it consisted only of everyday objects like a bowl of soup or a coffin or a matinee idol’s blank face. It was by combining and juxtaposing this bland material that Kuleshov could evoke an emotional response in the audience, a response which could not be triggered by the material itself but only by its organization and juxtaposition, in other words by film montage. The unchanging blank (or, as Prince and Hensley suggest, perhaps ambiguous) expression on Mozzhukhin’s face is particularly significant in this respect; the actor is simply one object among others, of no more affective significance in itself than a bowl of soup. The spectator is therefore unable to decide which particular emotion to project onto Mozzhukhin’s

face since *in itself* it gives no affective cues to the spectator. When the montage sequence cuts from, say, a bowl of soup to Mozzhukhin’s face (using the continuity device of matching on eyeline to imply that Mozzhukhin is “looking at” the bowl of soup), this cut exerts a rhetorical pressure on the spectator – that is, it persuades him or her that Mozzhukhin is looking at the bowl of soup and that the particular emotion his face “must” be expressing is therefore that of hunger. The spectator’s projection of an (abstract) feeling of hunger onto the image of the bowl of soup then becomes the projection of that (now supposedly real, since ascribed to a subject) feeling of hunger onto Mozzhukhin’s face. The spectator’s projective idealisation has therefore been modified by the montage, in the sense that the spectator has been induced to decide on a definite emotion which Mozzhukhin “must” be feeling and to project that emotion onto his actually blank but now apparently expressive face. When there is another cut from Mozzhukhin’s face to, say, a beautiful young woman and then back to Mozzhukhin’s face, the montage again exerts rhetorical pressure on the spectator to further modify their projective idealisation of the filmic text, this time to change the emotional state which the spectator will project onto Mozzhukhin’s face from hunger to desire. Without this process of projection, and the ability of the montage to alter those projections, the Kuleshov Effect would not operate. The Effect requires a transactive process in which the signification of the filmic text – that is, which particular emotion is “visible” on Mozzhukhin’s face – is constituted by the spectator’s projective idealisations, and the spectator’s affect – that is, his or her emotional response to what they see or think they see on the screen – is itself changed by the rhetorical pressures exerted by the montage construction of the sequence. The spectator projects things onto the filmic text which are not actually present in the text itself, while the assembly of the montage fragments is used to rhetorically persuade the spectator as to which particular emotion Mozzhukhin’s face is “expressing” at any given time. It is the mutual interaction of these two processes which constitutes the meaning of the montage sequence and generates the Kuleshov Effect. The affect (that is, the emotional content) of the montage sequence is not present in the material itself, which was deliberately chosen to be as bland and emotionally empty as possible; rather, it has been rhetorically triggered by the montage method interacting with the projective idealisation of the spectator. What Bazin asserted concerning deep-focus cinematography actually therefore applies to montage cinema too, albeit in a somewhat different way than

he intended: “It is from [the spectator’s] attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives” (Bazin 2005:36). Contrary to Bazin’s view, however, the spectator of the Kuleshov Effect, according to my analysis, is not exercising existential choice but is engaged in a transactive rhetorical process by which the meaning of the cinematic text is generated.

Kuleshov’s appraisal of one of his other montage experiments is equally applicable to the “Kuleshov Effect” experiment itself. He claimed that it

confirmed the immense possibilities of montage, which turned out to be so powerful that it could radically alter the material itself [...] because by means of montage it was possible to destroy, put right, or ultimately alter filmic material. (Kuleshov 1987:137)

The blankness (or at least the ambiguity) of Mozhukhin’s face is very important for the operation of the Kuleshov Effect. The issue of acting is central to the theory as well as the practice of montage cinema, even from its inception with Kuleshov’s montage experiments of the early 1920s. Even the Kuleshov Effect itself can be regarded as being as much an investigation of the function of the actor within cinema as an investigation of the artistic implications of the material basis of film itself.<sup>98</sup> The experiment can also be interpreted as demonstrating the fact that in cinema the audience is an active participant in the creation of the meaning of a film. The actor Mozhukhin’s face displays no emotion to the audience, yet it acquires an emotional affect by its juxtaposition with images of food or a girl or a coffin. In other words, contrary to the theatrical tradition in which the actor must project emotion towards the audience, in the cinema it is the audience which projects emotion onto the actor, as Kuleshov discovered, and this process is triggered by montage. This can be regarded as another example of the fact that audience projection – specifically the “projective idealization” described by Alcorn – is required for the Kuleshov Effect to operate. As Sargeant puts it,

Kuleshov [...] recognise[d] that, with the advent of cinema, expression is no longer signified by the actor alone, the emotion can be conveyed and stirred by montage of a number of elements between and within shots as much as by an actor’s performance. (2000:17)

Contrary to Alcorn’s model, it is therefore not merely the signifiers themselves of the filmic text which impose their “authority” on the spectator, but the *montage*

of those signifiers – their juxtaposition (Kuleshov and Pudovkin), their collision (Eisenstein), or the “intervals” between them (Vertov) – which exerts rhetorical pressure on the spectator’s projective idealisations, modifies the spectator’s affective response to it, and thereby generates the meaning of the filmic text.

My application of Alcorn’s model of the interaction between a reader and a literary text in an analysis of the Kuleshov Effect could also shed light on the problematic status of the Kuleshov Effect itself; in particular, the general lack of success of attempts to reproduce the Effect in modern times under scientifically rigorous conditions. This lack of success is puzzling if the Kuleshov Effect is analysed only on Kuleshov’s and Pudovkin’s own terms: as a deterministic, one-way process in which a predetermined response is mechanistically evoked in the spectator by montage. Evidence of the need for an analysis of the Kuleshov Effect in terms of a complex interaction between the rhetorical use of film montage and the projective idealisation brought to bear upon the film by a spectator can be found in the attempt to recreate the Kuleshov Effect experiment under scientific conditions by Prince and Hensley (1992). In their recreation of the experiment, Prince and Hensley fail to replicate the Kuleshov Effect as it was described by Kuleshov and Pudovkin. In their words, “there seems little reason to believe that the Kuleshov effect, *as reported*, any longer exists even if the effect did play a role at one time” (1992:69; original emphasis). They speculate about three possible causes for this failure (assuming that the Effect did occur in Kuleshov’s own experiment):<sup>99</sup> (i) early audiences were cinematically naive and lacked critical distance from what they were seeing on the screen; (ii) a response bias was introduced into the sample audience by Kuleshov communicating to them his own enthusiasm for montage; or (iii) there were stronger associational cues in the original footage used by Kuleshov than those he describes. Their general conclusion is that the Kuleshov Effect is probably a threshold phenomenon, and that a modern audience requires a more systematic and complex set of associational cues before they are able to project a changing affect onto a blank, unchanging face. The redundancy of the “classical style” of Hollywood cinema described in Bordwell et al. (1985:5) may be significant in this respect: there are almost always multiple cues to prompt a particular desired response from the audience at any given moment in a modern film. Prince and Hensley also speculate that Kuleshov may have used footage in which Mozhukhin’s face had an *ambiguous* expression rather than a blank or neutral one. If the Kuleshov Effect is indeed a threshold



effect, then an ambiguous expression would be more likely to trigger it than a neutral expression, since the objects (soup, coffin, child) would provide a context for the spectator to resolve that ambiguity. The fact that Kuleshov was using actual “found footage” from Tsarist films rather than footage specially shot for his experiment suggests that Mozhukhin’s expression actually was ambiguous, rather than being neutral as Kuleshov and Pudovkin had claimed.<sup>100</sup>

Prince and Hensley also cast doubt on the theoretical framework within which Kuleshov carried out his experiment, which they characterise as a mixture of formalism and Taylorism. As they say,

By all received accounts, the Mozhukin sequence proceeds like an assembly line efficiently producing meaning. As in the analogy of cinema and language, each shot performs almost like a word, combining with others to form a larger concept or phrase [...]. Like an assembly line, the production process of the montage is both sequential and predetermined. The viewer’s interpretations form an orderly pattern and fall neatly into place, cued by each shot combination [...]. Of course, the production of meaning in the Mozhukin sequence depends on the viewer’s contribution, the ability to use contextual cues to infer conventional meanings from associated images. But accounts of the experiment, characteristically, do not report a wide range of viewer interpretations [...]. The terms of this communication paradigm would seem to leave no place for our contemporary reception theories. How might the viewer contribute to the co-construction of cinematic meaning in a Kuleshov-type sequence? More precisely, what elements of film form might invite such participation? (1992:63-64)

This seems to me to be the crux of the matter. The intellectual framework within which Kuleshov was working and which largely determined the form of his thoughts on film montage was essentially that of mechanical (that is, non-dialectical) materialism. Film montage originated at the meeting point of the various and sometimes contradictory ideas of Ivan Pavlov and Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor and Karl Marx. The attitude of the avant-garde in Soviet Russia in the early 1920s was that film should operate like an industrial assembly line, producing meaning in a deterministic, mechanical fashion. Even Eisenstein initially shared this mechanistic approach to film montage, though he quickly recognised its limitations and later specifically singled out Kuleshov and Pudovkin for criticism due to their lack of dialectical thinking:

The worst of the matter is that an approach like this does really, like an insurmountable tram, block the possibilities of formal development. An approach like this condemns us not to dialectical development but to [the process of] mere evolutionary ‘perfection’, in so far as it does not penetrate to the dialectical essence of the phenomenon. (Eisenstein 1988:144)

In my view, it is precisely this non-dialectical, mechanical approach to film montage which created the problems with the Kuleshov Effect which Prince and Hensley describe. Kuleshov was effectively using contextual cues such as implicit eyeline matches to trigger the projection of predetermined emotional affect onto an actor’s neutral (or perhaps ambiguous) face, in the same sort of way that Pavlov was trying to trigger a predetermined reflex in his dogs as the invariable response to a given stimulus, such as the ringing of a bell. Kuleshov apparently succeeded in this aim at the time he carried out his experiment, yet a modern recreation of the same experiment apparently fails to show the Effect as he described it. The Kuleshov Effect may therefore indeed be a threshold effect, as Prince and Hensley suggest, which depends on a certain degree of ambiguity rather than neutrality in the expression on Mozzhukhin’s face and a certain critical threshold of editing cues such as eyeline matches. It is therefore necessary to grasp the interaction between the edited film footage and the spectator as a complex and dialectical one in order to properly understand the operation of the Kuleshov Effect. The deterministic and manipulative interpretation of the Effect which Kuleshov himself proposed, based on a crudely understood scientism and a mechanistic materialism, is inadequate for a proper analysis of his own Effect. As Metz has shown, the single shot is more analogous to a phrase or sentence rather than to a single word (1982a:26) and therefore cannot easily serve as a fundamental building block for a linearised construction of meaning. Furthermore, Kuleshov’s understanding of the process of signification in montage as being sequential and predetermined does not take any account of the role of the spectator in actively constituting the meaning of a montage sequence. Alcorn’s approach, in which the spectator’s projections are modified by the rhetorical pressure of the film’s signifiers (or in this case, the *montage* of the film’s signifiers), is surely a better model for the way in which “the viewer contribute[s] to the co-construction of cinematic meaning in a Kuleshov-type sequence” (Prince and Hensley 1992:64).

The canonical example of film montage, the so-called Kuleshov Effect, can therefore be interpreted as a modification of the projective idealisation of the

audience. This modification is prompted by the film-maker’s rhetorical manipulation of the audience’s emotional responses to repetitions of the *same* image, Mozzhukhin’s expressionless (or at least emotionally ambiguous) face. In his most famous montage experiment, Kuleshov demonstrated a rhetorical method of directly manipulating and changing the audience’s affective response to a given cinematic image by playing on the way their projective idealisation of that image is modified by its juxtaposition with the shots preceding and following it. Film montage itself can therefore be regarded as a rhetorical device, a means of changing the consciousness of the audience by persuading them in a transactive rhetorical process. And, raised onto the level of “intellectual montage” that Eisenstein aspired to, it even offers a means of changing their abstract ideas about, as well as their emotional responses to, a given image or shot.

## Chapter 5

# Classical Cinema and the System of the Suture

The relationship between Soviet montage cinema and classical cinema can by no means be reduced to one of simple opposition. The Soviet montage directors were reacting specifically against Tsarist cinema, which they (with the notable exception of Vertov) contrasted unfavourably with the modern, fast new style of the cinematic products of Hollywood. In order to explore the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between Soviet montage cinema and classical cinema, it is necessary to examine the nature both of the classical cinema and of Tsarist cinema, which differed in significant ways from the classical style. Furthermore, the analysis of the “system of the suture” used by the classical style must be used to understand the way in which the ideology of a film exists not merely on the level of the fiction or narrative of the film, but also on the level of the enunciation of the filmic text itself, in the process by which fragments of raw film footage are transformed into meaningful cinematographic statements.

### 5.1 Hollywood classical cinema and Soviet montage cinema

When the October Revolution occurred, cinema was already a quarter of a century old and Hollywood was in the final stages of establishing the “classical style” (also sometimes referred to as the “continuity style”) of film-making which would dominate first American and then world cinema to the present day.<sup>101</sup> In Kristin

Thompson's words, "from about 1909 to 1916, the transitional phase toward the classical cinema occurred, with the classical paradigm in place by 1917" (1985:159). The "classical style" therefore came into existence at almost the same time that the first experiments in montage cinema were being carried out by Kuleshov.<sup>102</sup> Though it certainly existed by 1917, the classical mode was not yet dominant – certainly not in Tsarist Russia – and had not yet achieved its current hegemony, either economically or stylistically. The Hollywood classical style was therefore received by the early Soviet montage directors as a breath of fresh air; it was seen as a modern, daring, even avant-garde new style, both dynamic and economical in its constructive principles and its effect on a mass audience.

Eisenstein in particular gained "hands-on" exposure to the new Hollywood continuity style in the early 1920s, when he assisted Esfir Shub in editing and censoring Western movies to make them ideologically acceptable for Soviet audiences.<sup>103</sup> In particular, he is believed to have helped modify D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse* (1922). Noël Burch has suggested the particular importance of Eisenstein's exposure to Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse* in developing his understanding of the classical style:

Fritz Lang's *Mabuse* diptych (1922) is an early example of the [classical Hollywood] system mastered to a perfection that has perhaps never been surpassed. And it is not without interest that Eisenstein had the opportunity of studying closely such a supreme example of the system [...], having been involved – in what capacity has not, I believe, been clearly established as yet – with the editing of the Soviet version of *Mabuse*. (Burch 1979:83)

Pudovkin had, by his own admission (Dart 1974:209), despised cinema as an artistic medium until he saw *Intolerance* for the first time. Griffith's film was a revelation to him of cinema's artistic and propagandistic potential (Leyda 1983:150). Vertov, of course, was hostile towards any sort of fictional film-making; the more significant influence on his own film-making practice was the tradition of Soviet journalism and reportage rather than Hollywood's classical style of fictional film-making, as Jeremy Hicks has convincingly demonstrated (2007:5-21). His conclusion is that, "Stylistically and in its approach to information, persuasion and communication, Vertov's film-making of the 1920s extends the model of the Bolshevik newspaper" (2007:8).

The Soviet montage film-makers' exposure to the early classical cinema of Hollywood (and of western Europe) in the early 1920s was crucial to their devel-

opment of montage cinema. At this early period, the classical style was not yet completely established as the hegemonic mode of film-making it was to become in later decades, as the dominant mode against which artistically and politically radical film-making had to define itself by challenging or subverting it. Kuleshov, Eisenstein and Pudovkin therefore felt able to use the new classical style as an ally in their attempt to develop a radical avant-garde alternative to what had been the dominant cinematic mode of their own time and place – Tsarist Russian cinema. Despite the nearly total collapse of the Tsarist film industry itself following the Revolution and Civil War (1917-21), the shortage of new films being made in the early years of Soviet power meant that old films made during the Tsarist era were still being widely exhibited throughout Russia even into the early 1920s (Taylor 1979:50-51), so Tsarist films still dominated the cinema screens even in the first years of Soviet power. The newness of the classical Hollywood mode was also an important factor here; it was a mode which had not yet entirely completed its formal development. Indeed, Burch has suggested that

[t]his “unfinished” state in which the system found itself, especially in Europe, played a decisive role in the orientations of the most important Soviet directors who, with only one exception, were otherwise quite prepared to accept the system’s claim to a privileged status. (1979:84)

The Soviet montage directors were therefore not actually reacting against the new classical style which was emerging from Hollywood (and also from western European film-makers influenced by Hollywood), which they actually rather admired, but specifically against *Tsarist* cinema, which they contrasted unfavourably with the cinematic products of Hollywood (Kuleshov 1987:38-41).

However, while Tsarist cinema was a late developer in terms of its adoption of the narrative and continuity techniques associated with the classical Hollywood style of film-making, it would not be correct to regard it as still being entirely stuck in the “primitive cinema” mode of film-making described by Kristin Thompson (1985:157-173). By the beginning of the Great War, Tsarist film-makers were already becoming more sophisticated than they had been only a few years previously; as Peter Kenez points out, “[t]he difference between *Stenka Razin* [1908] and *The Defence of Sevastopol*, made only three years later, is extraordinary” (2001:13). However, this increased sophistication was very uneven in its development – as late as 1916, even as relatively “progressive”<sup>104</sup> a director as Yevgeny Bauer (with whom Kuleshov had worked as a young set designer) would make

very few cuts within each individual scene of his films.<sup>105</sup> He would usually use a static or slow-moving camera set-up to film a complete scene in one take. Even dreams or hallucinations would be superimposed in the same frame above the head of the sleeping character, as in *The Dying Swan* (1916) for example.<sup>106</sup>

Even more significant is the fact that despite the increasingly sophisticated techniques of its film-makers, Tsarist cinema retained some unique characteristics which marked it out from the cinema of other nations. Tsivian has referred to “the distinguishing features of the Russian film style that set it apart from the generally accepted practice of the 1910s” (1994:7). Most of these features were in fact culturally determined, as Tsivian has convincingly argued (1998). In particular, the *slowness* of Tsarist cinema was notorious. In Tsivian’s own words,

The Russian cinema of the 1910s – not uninfluenced by the theories of dramatic timing associated with the Moscow Art Theatre – raised this style of acting to the level of a conscious aesthetic programme. As Kevin Brownlow observed, Russian cinema seems to have only two speeds: ‘slow’ and ‘stop’.” (1998:54)

One critic in 1916 even approvingly noted that “the involvement of our best actors in cinema will lead to the slowest possible tempo [...] their entire acting process is subjugated to a rhythm that rises and falls particularly *slowly*” (qtd. in Tsivian 1994:15). This connection between the entry of professional theatrical actors into Russian cinema in the 1910s and the slowness of the films they appeared in may help to explain the montage directors’ reluctance to use professional actors in their own films, and their preference for non-actors or “types”. Tsivian has even calls this slowness of Tsarist Russian films “a unique attribute of Russian cinema” (1998:54), and he ascribes it to the cultural milieu of Russia itself in the early twentieth century:

Traditionally, the kinesics of social life in Russia presumed an inverse relationship between the importance of an event and the speed with which it unfolded: as the importance of an event or a person increased, the action slowed down. The rule affected theatrical *mise-en-scène*, diplomatic protocol and, to a certain extent, the kinesics of everyday behaviour. Russians generally judged American films to be ‘too hectic’ [*suetlivyi*], and a standard epithet for a foreigner was ‘fidgety’ [*vertlyavyi*]. (1998:56)

This may have been more true for the educated upper classes of Tsarist Russia than for the working class, however – Kuleshov observed in 1914-16 that working

class audiences preferred the fast-paced American movies to the slow, ponderous products of Russian movie studios (Kuleshov 1987:40).

Moreover, the use of camera movements by even as sophisticated and influential a director as Bauer still bore the traces of what Burch has called “the primitive mode of representation (PMR)”, which he calls “a stable system with its own inherent logic and durability” (Burch 1990:220). As Tsivian has noted, Bauer’s use of “in” and “out” tracking shots was “interpersonal rather than space-bound” (Tsivian 1998:205); that is, rather than being used to activate the space of the set (as the so-called “*Cabiria* movement” was), such camera movements were used to play “the role of a transformer of energy: the energy of the moving camera was converted into the energy of the face, figure, or detail that was coming towards the viewer” (1998:206). This was a use of camera movement which was not part of the classical style and depended on the tendency of early cinema audiences to “project discourse upon diegesis”, to use Tsivian’s phrase (1998:199). Such camera movements as Bauer did use, then, tended to belong to the “primitive mode of representation” rather than the new classical mode.

In fact, what the montage directors rejected in Tsarist cinema were essentially those aspects of it which made it a specifically *Russian* cinema – the slowness, the introspection, the mystical psychologism, the melodramatic narratives. Yet as Tsarist cinema absorbed some of the lessons of the newly emerging classical style, it actually seemed to strengthen those characteristics which the montage directors disliked so much – in effect, from the viewpoint of the montage filmmakers, Tsarist cinema was learning all the wrong lessons from American cinema, adopting the psychologism and seamless narratives of the classical style but not the rapid cutting or the dynamic plots. The montage directors therefore did not reject Tsarist cinema *tout court*, but were actually nostalgic for an earlier period of Tsarist cinema, the period when it was still a “cinema of attractions” before beginning to adopt the worst aspects of the Hollywood classical style of film-making.<sup>107</sup> In some respects, montage cinema (especially as theorised and practiced by Eisenstein) represented a self-conscious return to an earlier phase of Tsarist cinema, rejecting the narrative-based introspective psychology and the characteristically Russian slowness of the later Tsarist cinema. They embraced the spectacle and the attractions of the “primitive cinema” of Tsarist Russia, combined with the speed, dynamism, rapid cutting and concentration on objects rather than people of the new Western classical style of films, especially the



Hollywood comedies and detective movies.

Vance Kepley has brought out the essential difference between Tsarist cinema and American cinema of this period very instructively by comparing D. W. Griffith's Biograph movie *The Lonely Villa* (1909) with Yakov Protazanov's re-make of it, *Drama by Telephone* (1914). As well as substituting an obligatory unhappy ending (characteristic of Tsarist cinema) for Griffith's happy ending (characteristic of Hollywood cinema), Protazanov "is not concerned with the rhythm or tension of the attempted rescue, and he does not exploit parallel editing" (Kepley 1979:23). As Kepley notes, "The Russian artist, in borrowing Griffith's tale, specifically rejects Griffith's most famous stylistic contribution to the genre" (1979:24). And this was not merely a failing of the Tsarist directors of the time; Tsarist audiences too found Griffith's rapid cutting and parallel editing unacceptably avant-garde. Despite being imported into Russia as early as 1916,<sup>108</sup> Griffith's epic film *Intolerance* was shelved by the Tsarist distributors in the belief that Russian audiences would be confused by it. For them to forego potential profits despite having already paid for the film, there must have been some basis in reality for their conviction.

It is worth noting that Tsivian has ascribed this propensity for unhappy endings in Tsarist Russian films not to the "the gloomy Russian soul" but to the fact that the narratives of Tsarist films were often derived from nineteenth-century Russian theatrical melodrama, which (unlike the Western theatrical melodrama) was itself derived from an adaptation of classical tragedy to a mass audience (Tsivian 1994:8). The pessimistic "Russian ending" in Tsarist films of the 1910s is therefore merely another symptom of Tsarist cinema's aspiration to emulate the forms of high art, to put the roof on the edifice of their own cinema before digging the foundations.

Kuleshov in particular admired the narrative efficiency and the energy of the American films, which he believed to be in such contrast to the theatrical longeurs of the Tsarist cinema. However, we must be careful not to misread such longeurs. As Tsivian has reminded us,

It is quite possible that some of the idiosyncrasies of Russian film style (certain static pauses, for example) will some day be explained by the music that was supposed to be played with these films – especially because the 'moods' themselves were often induced into actors by 'mood music' played on the set. (1998:92)

Needless to say, such “mood music” accompanied by static pauses would have been anathema to Kuleshov’s style of film-making. Indeed, Kuleshov wrote scathingly about “those who cling to the vapid psychological porridge of the old Russian movies born of the syphilitic theatre” (Kuleshov 1987:56). Incidentally, it was probably Mozzhukhin’s adaptation to such a mode of film-making which led to “his formidable gaze” and the “concentrated static internalisation of emotion” (Sargeant 2000:9) of his acting style, a static blankness of expression which Kuleshov found useful when constructing his famous montage experiment.

Kuleshov’s ambition when making his own films was to use montage to achieve a similar efficiency as that of Hollywood film-makers. For Kuleshov, “the classical Hollywood film style [...] epitomized an efficiency of filmic discourse” (Kepley 1992:137). The contrast with Tsarist cinema could not have been greater. As Kuleshov said of his observations of Russian audiences of the time:

I was always struck by the reaction of audiences to American films. The reaction was violent, and showed how much the audience was carried away by the film, the extent to which they lived the action on the screen. I thought a lot about this and arrived at the conclusion that the power of this cinema lay in the montage and in the use of close-ups, methods which were never used by the Russian film-makers. This was the first influence on me. (Kuleshov 1973:71)

He identified the source of this effect on the audience – the means by which the films aroused it to a state of excitement and induced a physical response to what the audience saw on the screen – as being the American use of rapid cutting, which he referred to as “American editing”.

There is an interesting and significant parallel here between the physical responses which the American films induced in the proletarian audience, observed by Kuleshov, and the involuntary motor responses which Eisenstein believed plays and films constructed according to the “montage of attractions” should be able to induce in their audience. Eisenstein believed that the ability to induce such involuntary motor responses through montage was necessary in order to be able to condition the reflexes of the audience in a similar way to Pavlov’s conditioning of dogs’ reflexes under laboratory conditions (Eisenstein 1988:125,155). The purpose of such conditioning was of course propagandistic: to inculcate a desired set of political beliefs into the audience through physiological conditioning. Eisenstein even went so far as to place firecrackers under the audience’s seats during

the performances of *Wiseman* to provoke precisely such involuntary motor responses in the audience (1988:36). American movies were using rapid cutting and the “attractions” of car chases, fights and slapstick as similar stimuli which, according to Kuleshov’s observations, also induced involuntary motor responses in the audience.

Kuleshov later said of his observations that

[w]hat immediately caught our attention when we watched American films was that they consisted of a whole series of very short shots, or brief sequences joined together in some definite order, unlike Russian films, which at the time were made up of a few long scenes, monotonously following one after another. (Kuleshov 1987:133)

Kuleshov’s assertion that “[r]apid montage was then called American montage, and slow montage, Russian” (1987:135) is indicative of the fact that continuity in the classical style of American film-making is achieved *through cutting*. As Bordwell says, “the classical cinema is a cinema of cutting; the single-shot sequence is very rare” (1985:46). The “continuity” of the classical style is really an effect in the mind of the spectator rather than a quality inherent in the film material itself, which is often almost as fragmented as a montage film. Burch has called this “the [classical Hollywood] system’s greatest ‘secret’: the fact that a film is made up of fragments of montage, that it is not by nature but by artifice that the classical *découpage* produces an effect of continuity” (1979:92). André Bazin’s position can therefore be seen to have been just as hostile towards the analytical editing of classical cinema as it was towards montage cinema. Bazin dreamed of “a film form that would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments, that would reveal the hidden meanings in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them” (Bazin 2005:38). Classical cinema was clearly not such a film form, any more than was montage cinema.

The development of the continuity style film was also, and necessarily, accompanied by the simultaneous development of what might be called the “continuity style spectator”, trained to expect and to effortlessly read the narrative and continuity cues of the classical style. Burch has stated that “the extraordinary expansion of the American cinema and its rise to world domination after World War I was a direct consequence of the creation of that audience during the period 1905-15” (1979:78); that is, the creation of a mass audience which included the various strata of the bourgeoisie as well as the working class. The “contin-

ity style” of classical cinema therefore developed *together* with its training of its necessary mass audience; the various continuity devices of classical cinema were not merely clever innovations of a few “inspired” geniuses for which the cinema audience had been passively waiting. Classical cinema did not merely “perfect” itself by adapting to the pre-existing cognitive abilities of its audience; rather, there was a period during which the classical cinema and its audience adapted themselves to each other through a complex process of interaction. As Burch has pointed out, some of the “primitive” films dating from before the establishment of the classical continuity style can be almost incomprehensible for a modern spectator at first viewing. He uses the example of a Biograph film, *Tom Tom the Piper’s Son* (1905), in the opening shot of which

what is meant to be the central action – the preliminaries leading up to the theft of the pig, the theft itself, and the start of the chase as the thief escapes – is nearly invisible for the modern spectator at first glance. For he is accustomed to having each shot in a film carefully organized around a single signifying center and to the linearization of all the iconographic signifiers through composition, lighting, and/or editing. (Burch 1979:82)

Metz has also emphasised the point that

the cinematic institution is not just the cinema industry [...], it is also the mental machinery – another industry – which spectators ‘accustomed to the cinema’ have internalised historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films.<sup>109</sup> (1982b:7)

The effect of continuity in the classical Hollywood cinema is achieved through cutting and then suturing those cuts, using matches on action, eyeline matches, and so on. It is important to note that this process begins with the way the material is actually *shot*, and is not merely a particular method of editing. By the same token, Kuleshov asserted that “montage is unquestionably subordinate to shooting” (Kuleshov 1987:42), and then described the best way in which a hypothetical scene should be shot according to montage principles (1987:43). Vertov even insisted that montage begins *before* shooting (Vertov 1984:72), and he listed the stages of editing a film as:

1. Editing during observation
2. Editing after observation

3. Editing during filming
4. Editing after filming
5. Gauging by sight (hunting for montage fragments)
6. The final editing. (Vertov 1984:72)

Vertov defined editing very broadly as “the organization of the visible world”, in contrast to editing in the “artistic cinema”, which he considered to be merely “the splicing together of individual filmed scenes according to a scenario” (1984:72). Furthermore, Eisenstein often insisted on the necessity of considering the framing of a shot and the issue of montage at the same time in order to “shatter the dualism ‘shot – montage’ [...] [and] apply our experience of montage directly to the problem of the theory of the shot” (Eisenstein 1988:146), and he asserted that “montage is a stage derived from the shot [...]. Montage is the leap made by internal shot composition into a new quality” (1991:12).

In its complex interaction between fragmentation and continuity, the classical Hollywood style therefore bears a similarity to the Kuleshov Effect, which achieves its famous effect on an audience by means of a dialectical interaction between fragmentation and continuity. In one sense, the Kuleshov Effect demonstrates the power of *continuity* in film: without the propensity of the audience to link together the montage fragments into a coherent whole by means of eyeline matches (so that Mozzhukhin is “looking at” each object in turn) there would be no “Effect” at all. Kepley even goes so far as to assert that “[t]hese experiments, appropriated by so many film historians for so many purposes, in fact betray Kuleshov’s appropriation of classical continuity” (1992:138). However, without *fragmentation* there would be no Kuleshov Effect either: the emotional impact which Kuleshov and Pudovkin described the experiment as having had on its audience was achieved not through the images themselves, which were deliberately chosen to be innocuous and to have no emotional power in their own right, but through their juxtaposition against each other. So the Kuleshov Effect can be seen from two mutually contradictory yet complementary perspectives: as demonstrating the power of continuity *and* the power of montage. As Amy Sergeant puts it, the Kuleshov Effect experiment “seemingly produce[s] results which, if not entirely contradictory, are at least not simultaneously sustainable” (2000:8). The apparent contradiction can be resolved by regarding the relationship between continuity and fragmentation in Kuleshov’s theory of montage as being a dialectic-

tical one: they are complementary and opposing poles, held in dialectical tension, and both are necessary for a full understanding of montage theory. The Kuleshov Effect montage experiment may have made use of some of the devices of classical continuity style, but it went beyond the continuity style itself to achieve new effects and exert a new and unique influence over the cinema audience.

Kuleshov's enthusiasm for American movies was itself part of a larger "Americanitis" which infected Soviet society in the early 1920s. Kuleshov referred to his own "Americanitis" in preferring the products of American cinema to those of Tsarist Russian cinema (Kuleshov 1987:40-41). The word seems to have been generally used in Soviet Russia in the 1920s to refer to the "disease" of those who regarded the industrial modernity, radical and populist new art forms and dynamic progress of American society of the time as a model to be emulated by Russia, much to the disapproval of many of the older generation:

Perfunctory critics and wise old officials used to be horrified by 'Americanitis' and suspense in films, and attributed the success of such pictures to the loose morals and bad taste of the young and working-class audiences. (1987:40).

Ian Christie has referred to "the cultural pulse of the period – Eccentric, populist and fascinated by all things American" (Christie 1994:97,229,n.65). As a relatively young, dynamic society which had invented many of the modern techniques of mass production, America held a fascination for the intelligentsia of a backward, agrarian society which had just undergone an unprecedented political revolution and wanted to catch up with the modern world as quickly as possible. For example, the rationalisation of work processes which had recently been invented by the American Frederick Winslow Taylor<sup>110</sup> was fashionable even in Soviet government circles. Lenin himself had expressed admiration for Taylor's system as a means of improving labour productivity and had asserted in 1918 that "[w]e must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our own ends" (Lenin 1968:414). Aleksei Gastev, who organised the Central Institute of Labour in Moscow in 1920, was also an ardent proponent of Taylorism.<sup>111</sup> This obsession with rationalisation and efficiency quickly spread to the arts, finding its most uncompromising expression in Russian Constructivism. The rationalisation of work processes was to be taken up by the montage film-makers themselves, via both Meyerhold's system of "Biomechanics" and Kuleshov's "actor-model" [*naturshchik*].

It is also important to remember that, as Kepley has said, “In the historical circumstances in which Kuleshov found himself, Hollywood film-making practice represented cinema’s closest approximation to Constructivism” (1992:144). The Hollywood studio system of the time could be seen as the cinematic equivalent of Henry Ford’s factories: assembling the ready-made elements of a film into a maximally efficient mass-produced and mass-distributed finished product. In fact, cinema itself could be seen as the Constructivist art form *par excellence*: film-making involves collaborative labour using sophisticated modern technology in a studio, or “film factory” as they were known in Russia,<sup>112</sup> in the most economically efficient way possible. And nowhere at that time was this industrial approach to film-making more apparent than in Hollywood.

Furthermore, this efficiency and rationalism could be put to directly agitational uses; the methods of the new Hollywood classical style seemed ideally suited for the purposes of political propaganda. As Boris Arvatov asserted, “The American film is not merely constructive; it is, in addition, of maximum agitational value in its very forms” (qtd. in Taylor 1979:38). However, to serve this agitational purpose, the *function* of the devices and techniques used by Hollywood would have to be changed, since (from the viewpoint of the Soviet film-makers) American cinema was wasting its own tremendous political and social potential by using it by creating frivolous entertainment for a petty-bourgeois mass audience. As Arvatov put it:

Agitation is not dreaming; agitation is practical action . . . .

America has opted for pure entertainment.

The R.S.F.S.R.<sup>113</sup> must give entertainment its special, social purpose. (Qtd. in Taylor 1979:38)

The Russian Constructivist A. Filippov made a direct link between this use of a functional, agitational art and a fundamental Marxist principle:

The aspirations of the new productional art can be formulated by applying to artists K. Marx’s idea about scientists: artists in varying ways have merely depicted the world but their task is to change it. (Qtd. in Bann 1974:23)

Such a task, if taken seriously, would require a systematic study by film-makers of the way in which a given cinematic technique (for example, the fast cutting in American comedy films) achieved its emotional and physical effects on an

audience. Once this was understood, then the montage film-makers could deploy that technique as one of an array of cinematic techniques to achieve any desired effect on a given audience, which would in principle enable them to perfect cinema as a propaganda weapon. Such an ambition was the ultimate motivation which lay behind the experiments of the Kuleshov Workshop in the early 1920s. Kuleshov's aim was to take those elements of Hollywood cinema which he regarded as most progressive, such as its rapid editing and its concentration on physical action, and change their function from providing entertainment to communicating and reinforcing political points. These progressive elements of Hollywood classical cinema would be united with a Constructivist ethos in which a work of art is an artificial construct rather than a simple reflection of reality. The purpose of such a procedure was to exert an overwhelming influence on the state of mind of the cinema audience, to change their state of excitation and their political consciousness.

It is important to note that the contrast between Soviet montage cinema and Hollywood classical cinema does not lie simply in the fact that montage cinema involves the active, productive participation of the audience while classical cinema presupposes a passively consuming audience. As Bordwell has noted, "The belief that classical narration is invisible often accompanies an assumption that the spectator is passive" (1985:37), but in fact the spectator *is* an active participant when he or she views a "classical style" film: "Classical films call forth activities on the part of the spectator. These activities may be highly standardized and comparatively easy to learn, but we cannot assume that they are simple" (1985:7). Indeed, if this were not the case then there would hardly have been any need for the process by which the classical style and its mass audience conditioned each other in the process of its formation between the approximate dates of 1909 and 1917.<sup>114</sup> Consumption itself is not a simple act, and the spectator must be trained to be a good consumer of movies. The fundamental distinction is therefore not between the active audience of a montage film and the passive audience of a classical film, but between the *consciously* active audience of a montage film and the *non-consciously* active audience of a classical film. The "activities on the part of the spectator" which Bordwell rightly claims to be necessary in the consumption of a classical Hollywood movie are in fact largely non-conscious activities, rather as the mechanics of driving a car are largely non-conscious for an experienced driver. It is for this reason that watching a film in the classical style feels "natural"



and effortless to the spectator; the active mental processes involved in watching a classical style film are more akin to trained reflexes than conscious cognitive engagement. The Soviet montage directors – especially Eisenstein – were certainly interested in training the reflexes of the audience, but they also wished to arouse the conscious mind of the spectator, to make him or her *consciously* think about what they were seeing. The activity involved in watching a Soviet montage film is therefore of a different quality than that involved in watching a continuity style film: it is actually conscious activity. This is related of course to the montage directors' wish, as Marxists, to raise the level of political and social consciousness of the audience of their films. In other words, the aesthetic “difficulty” of a Soviet montage film as compared to a classical Hollywood movie is inseparable from its function as political rhetoric, as propaganda.

It must also be emphasised that the Soviet montage directors did not adopt the methods and approach of the American classical cinema *tout court*. As Anna Lawton has pointed out,

Kuleshov's conception of cinema took shape in the atmosphere of Russian Constructivism, and [...] he borrowed only those elements of 'Americanism' – dynamism, energy, and economy – that fit into the Constructivist philosophical frame. (Lawton 1992:4)

This selective adoption of certain aspects of the continuity style, and its fusion of these aspects with avant-garde artistic trends dominant in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s such as Constructivism, Productivism and Futurism, meant that Soviet montage cinema was always going to be a distinctive method of film-making, independent from the American classical style and challenging some of its fundamental principles. The montage directors adopted only certain aspects of the emerging classical style of Hollywood – economy of construction, certain technical devices such as the match on action, eyeline matches, etc. – but not other, equally important aspects, such as the use of a causally deterministic narrative based on the goal-oriented motivations of individual characters as the fundamental organising principle (“[c]haracter-centered – i.e., personal or psychological – causality is the armature of the classical story,” in Bordwell's words (1985:13)). This rejection of narrative was critical, and was probably motivated to a great extent by political considerations. As Bordwell has emphasised, there is a connection between the smooth psychologically-motivated narratives of Hollywood and a political ideology based on individualism and personal ambition:

It is easy to see in the goal-oriented protagonist a reflection of an ideology of American individualism and enterprise, but it is the peculiar accomplishment of the classical cinema to translate this ideology into a rigorous chain of cause and effect. (1985:16)

Soviet montage directors, by contrast, tended to conceive of causality as social rather than individual, economic rather than psychological; causality in their films is generally supraindividual and historical.<sup>115</sup> The classical cinema of Hollywood could not contain such an attitude towards characters and causality without bursting the bounds of its own style. Within the limits of that style, history is unknowable apart from its effects upon individual characters. The montage directors, in contrast, wanted to make history knowable to their audience, and knowable in an “objective” Marxist sense rather than a subjective personalised sense. A film such as Pudovkin’s *The End of St Petersburg* (1927), with its aim of imparting a Marxist vision of the historical process to its audience, would be inconceivable in the form of a classical style film: its form would be hopelessly at odds with its political message. The same is true for the montage films of Eisenstein: as Schreurs has pointed out, “Eisenstein’s objective was not to recount history, but to ‘explain’ the significance and ideological background of what happened. The basic historical linearity of the film [*October*] is constantly interrupted, complicated by intellectual attractions” (Schreurs 1989:15).

The essential point to understand here is that, as Kristin Thompson points out, “what the psychological character was in the unification of the longer narrative, the continuity rules were in the unification of time and space” (Thompson 1985:162). The montage directors took only those devices of the continuity style which enabled them to “linearize the iconographic signifiers”; that is, to construct a linear series of cinematographic signs which could be “read” by the spectator instead of the chaotic jumble of iconographic signifiers in early cinema (Burch 1979:82). They ignored the classical style’s use of the goal-oriented psychological character to motivate and unify narrative. This selective borrowing from classical cinema led to the creation of a method of film-making which, while it used some of the same devices as the Hollywood continuity style, was radically different from that style in its political and social assumptions and in its effects on an audience. In terms of the analysis of the classical style given by Bordwell (1985:1-84), the Soviet montage directors adopted and adapted many of the *devices* of the continuity style, but did not adopt its *systems* (narrative, time and space),

nor its *relations of systems* (1985:6). As Bordwell rightly says, “In sum, Soviet montage cinema constituted a challenge to classical narrative and decoupage on almost every front: narrative unity, narrational voice and point-of-view, spatial and temporal continuity” (1985:73).

The montage directors responded to the newly-established classical style of Hollywood in differing ways; Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Eisenstein took from it, in varying degrees, those elements and techniques which they believed would best serve their differing rhetorical strategies in their own film-making, while Vertov rejected it completely. For example, in the early 1920s, Kuleshov and Pudovkin set themselves the task of studying and appropriating the major genres of the Hollywood movie industry for their own purposes because of their belief that

the institutional mode of representation, the genres and other coded systems founded upon it, offered ideal vehicles in the ideological struggle because of the privileged relationships which they already enjoyed with mass audiences. (Burch 1979:85)

Kuleshov, the founder of Soviet montage cinema, was actually the montage director who owed the most to the classical Hollywood cinema, in terms of genre and technique. The classical style movie, especially the Hollywood genre films such as the Western, the slapstick comedy or the spy movie, was simply the most efficient and direct way of gaining access to the minds of a mass audience. As Burch puts it,

The urban masses were already quite familiar with the current mode of representation and forms of expression, and it was obvious that one important way of reaching them consisted in acquiring the theoretical mastery of that mode and in appropriating its forms of expression. (1979:85)

What Kuleshov rejected were the commercial aims of Hollywood cinema, and its implicit petty-bourgeois ideology of individualism.

Pudovkin, Kuleshov’s erstwhile pupil and collaborator, had a similar approach but was more willing to extend the limits of the Hollywood classical style and to some extent go beyond those limits, particularly in the construction of diegetic space. In fact, Burch identifies Pudovkin’s commitment to using and extending the linearised and rationalised narrative of classical cinema as being the fundamental root of his periodic disputes with Eisenstein:

Pudovkin's writings and his polemic with Eisenstein clearly bear out the evidence of his films: his chief concern was to draw the ultimate consequences from that historical process of linearization of the iconographic signifiers. (Burch 1979:86)

What Burch refers to as the "linearization of the iconographic signifiers" is the tendency of Hollywood cinema to assign only a single, easily-read meaning to each element of its films; this tendency is connected with the "redundancy" which Bordwell identifies as being characteristic of the classical style (1985:5). Ambiguity and multiple meanings tend to be avoided in the classical style; both the narrative and the meaning of a film are, in principle, linear. Pudovkin, of all the major montage directors, sticks closest to this linearised way of constructing a film. Pudovkin's "constant concern is [...] to regulate the 'flow of signs' as closely as possible" (Burch 1979:86). His aim in doing so, however, in contrast to Hollywood cinema, is primarily rhetorical rather than commercial: to grasp and control the spectator's attention and to *convince* him of something. Pudovkin even describes this rhetorical process as the fundamental purpose of montage itself: "Of course everyone knows that the essence of correct montage is the correct management of the viewer's attention" in order "to influence the masses, to convey a particular enthusiasm, and to force even people with opposing views to be disturbed, directly and against their will" (Pudovkin 2006:16,23), and Burch refers to "Pudovkin's analytical penchant, his concern to make each picture into a 'brick' as elementary as possible in a chain of signification which he can control as closely as possible" (1979:87).

Eisenstein, on the other hand, was much more prepared to violate the linearity of the classical style. *October* is full of such moments; one example Burch gives is of the mechanical peacock which Eisenstein intercuts with Kerensky entering a room of the Winter Palace. It is "so tightly meshed into the movement of the door itself that it resists any reduction to a single signifying function" (Burch 1979:90). This example is characteristic both of the lack of redundancy in Eisenstein's films and the breaking of the "linearization of the iconographic signifiers", which enables him to give the signifiers complex and multi-layered meanings and functions within the film as a whole. Eisenstein can therefore be assigned a position further from the classical style than either Kuleshov or Pudovkin. However, Eisenstein still in some sense takes that classical style for granted, as the ground against which he can create dissonance and counterpoint, whose syntax he can

disrupt and whose tropes he can exploit for rhetorical and emotional effect. Indeed, Burch goes so far as to claim that “Eisenstein became the first to succeed in relativizing certain fundamental norms of the institutional mode of representation” (1979:92). But such innovation could only be possible by remaining, as it were, in the orbit of that mode of representation rather than entirely disengaging from it. Burch has said that Eisenstein

shared with Pudovkin and Kuleshov the deep conviction that the ‘language’ with which the name of Griffith was then so closely associated was tantamount to a basic language. [...] This is the nerve center of his polemic with Vertov. (1979:93)

Vertov can therefore be regarded as having been more radical in his approach to the institution of cinema than Eisenstein or the other montage directors in the sense that he explicitly rejected the “basic language” of fictional films *tout court*. However, this total rejection of the institution of classical cinema meant that Vertov, unlike Eisenstein, was unable to revolutionise or even to reform it in any way. He therefore risked becoming marginalised by the cinematic mainstream, which is indeed what actually happened, both in the Soviet Union and in the West, until the 1960s. Vertov, of course, was the only one of the Soviet montage directors who utterly rejected the classical style of fictional film-making, and who wanted to replace it with a radically new institutional framework of film production and distribution, to create a truly revolutionary cinema which would owe nothing to the genres or narrative modes of commercial cinema. In *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov plays with some of the tropes of the standard genres of the commercial cinema – the romance, the adventure film, and so on – but only in order to parody them and expose them as a cinematic opium poisoning the minds of the working class. As Burch has said, Vertov’s “chief target is the fundamental linearity of filmic representation, a linearity contested in all its aspects, and no longer simply in that of syntax, as was chiefly the case with Eisenstein” (1979:94). Vertov’s films resist being read in the way a film in the Hollywood classical style is read; if such a reading is attempted, then they appear to be merely a pointless display of “cinematic fireworks”. This may explain Eisenstein’s otherwise puzzling misjudgement of *The Man with a Movie Camera* as “formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief” (Eisenstein 1977:43). He seems to have been reading Vertov’s film as though it had been made in accordance with the norms of the classical style, and of course when read in such a way it could

*only* appear to be a display of mere virtuosity, devoid of purpose or sense. The fact that Eisenstein could not read Vertov's film according to its own standards (which Vertov had clearly outlined in the intertitles which open the film) indicates Eisenstein's own debt to that institutional mode of representation and his refusal to entirely repudiate it.<sup>116</sup> This complex and sometimes contradictory relationship with the Hollywood continuity style of fictional film-making – neither entirely accepting nor entirely rejecting it – was actually characteristic of Soviet montage cinema as a movement in general; it was Vertov's complete rejection of it which was unusual, in fact unparalleled.

## 5.2 The system of the suture

The relationship between Soviet montage cinema and classical cinema was therefore a complex one, and can by no means be reduced to one of simple opposition. However, there were fundamental differences between the two modes of film-making, both in their political and social aims and in the way in which ideology is embodied in their films. In order to investigate this difference, it is first necessary to introduce the “system of the suture” as it applies to classical cinema.

The notion of the “system of the suture” was developed as a means of using Lacanian psychoanalysis to understand the process by which a film, especially in classical cinema, achieves narrative coherence and closure by “stitching” the subjectivity of the viewer into the filmic text. Stephen Heath has likened the system of the suture to “a stitching or tying as in the surgical joining of the lips of a wound” (1981:13), the wound in question being, in Lacanian terms, the gap which opens in the human psyche between the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders. Daniel Dayan (1974) has characterised the system of the suture as “the tutor-code of classical cinema”, and has defined it to be the particular historical articulation of cinema as a discourse which reinforces the hegemonic ideology of society, implying that it operates to interpellate the spectator in an Althusserian sense (Althusser 2001:85-126).

The analysis of the system of the suture began as a development by Jacques-Alain Miller (1978) of some aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis,<sup>117</sup> and was first applied to film theory in 1969 by Jean-Pierre Oudart (1978), one of the critics writing for *Cahiers du cinéma*. It gained popularity in Britain and North America following an exposition of Oudart's work in English by Daniel Dayan (1974).

However, before the cinematic system of the suture can be described, it is first necessary to introduce some of the basic concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

### The mirror stage in Lacanian psychoanalysis

Lacan used the term “suture” in his studies in child psychology to refer to the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, which he regarded as being characterised by an unstable relationship between what he called the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders; these orders are formed in early childhood and thereafter always co-exist with each other.<sup>118</sup> According to Lacan, the Imaginary is that order of mental existence which originates in infancy when a child sees its own reflection in a mirror for the first time (usually while being held in the arms of its mother) and perceives itself as a unified being at the centre of the world. Lacan describes this as a moment of *jouissance* or jubilation, a moment of untroubled narcissistic identification with the perceived unified being of the mother. This is the famous Lacanian “mirror stage” (Lacan 1977:3-9), which occurs when the child is weaned from its mother and which normally lasts from the age of six to eighteen months. Lacan associated this stage of development with the child’s formation of an identity separate from that of its mother and with the child’s first understanding of the concepts of space, distance and position. This connection between the mirror stage and the visual grasp of a coherent, three-dimensional space in which people and objects are located and through which they move is highly significant for the system of the suture as applied to cinema, as will be seen. Before the mirror stage, the child had an illusory notion of unity with its mother and had no concept of having an existence separate from her. This initial undifferentiated identification with the mother is the first stage of Lacan’s Imaginary order, of which the mirror stage is the second. The Imaginary itself is constituted through the mirror stage, at a time when the infant does not yet have control over its own body as a unified whole, but only over isolated discrete parts in an incoherent fashion. However, although the child’s motor control is not yet mature, its visual faculty is already highly developed<sup>119</sup> and the child therefore identifies itself with *the visual image* of the mother and thereby perceives its own body as a unified whole by analogy with the visual image of the mother’s body and its own body in the mirror. The notion of possessing a unified body and a unified ego therefore comes to the infant from outside; it is a fantasy before it becomes a reality. Identity is therefore one effect of the Imaginary, which is the

structure through which images are formed.

However, during the later phases of the mirror stage, the male child<sup>120</sup> recognises its difference from the mother and identifies itself as separate from her. The mother becomes the “other” for the male child (Lacan calls it *l’object petit-a* [the little-a object, “a” standing for *autre*], meaning the “little-o other”, the (m)other) and this leads the child to experience a sense of the absence and loss of the mother. According to Lacan, it is now that the Oedipus complex intervenes in the process of maturation to dissolve the mirror stage and push the child into the Symbolic order. The child senses its separation from the mother and desires to be reunited with her, a desire which is now sexually driven. The child wishes to make itself as indispensable to the mother as she is to it by imagining itself to be what the mother lacks and therefore desires: the phallus, as Lacan terms it. By imagining itself as the phallus – the signifier without a signified which represents the necessarily absent object of desire – the child imagines it will complete the mother and therefore itself be completed by her. However, the male child is forbidden to achieve his incestuous reunification with the mother by the father. This intervention by a third party, whom the mother desires, forbids the child’s desire to be what the mother desires and therefore prevents the imaginary state of union with the mother. The child fears castration by the father and therefore obeys the Law of the Father, the repression of his desire constituting his unconscious. Since the Law of the Father is a verbal prohibition (the commandment “Thou shalt not desire what was my desire”), patriarchal law is therefore a Symbolic order and the unconscious is therefore structured like a language; desire is repressed as that which cannot be spoken. Furthermore, by the act of obeying the Law of the Father, the male child enters into the Symbolic order, which is the patriarchal order and represents social stability under the Law of the Father. By entering this Symbolic order, the male child adopts a speaking position which makes his separation from the mother irreversible. He becomes a subject of the Symbolic; he becomes a speaking subject whose spoken “I” comes from the same position of authority as the voice of the Father. He therefore conforms to the patriarchal law, he upholds it and fulfils his Oedipal trajectory by seeking a female other than his mother with whom to sexually unite. Since the Law of the Father is verbal, Lacan was therefore proposing a linguistic basis for subjectivity – human subjectivity, the unconscious and language are all closely interrelated in Lacanian psychoanalysis. As Heath puts it, “The unconscious is the fact of



the constitution-division of the subject in language; an emphasis which can lead Lacan to propose replacing the notion of the unconscious with that of the subject in language” (1981:79).<sup>121</sup>

The Symbolic order does not simply replace the Imaginary order; rather, it functions to *regulate* the Imaginary. Both the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders are always co-present once the mirror stage has been passed. The psyche fluctuates between a desire for the unified being of the Imaginary, with its associated untroubled *jouissance* and narcissism, and the realisation imposed by the Symbolic that it is not a unified being at the centre of the world but is merely part of a larger order, a field of contradiction and conflict within which the individual must struggle to define and assert him- or herself. Upon entry into the Symbolic, the child feels no longer whole but divided, and attempts to signify itself through language, which comes from outside itself as the Law of the Father. The Symbolic is what Lacan called “the Other” (the capital letter signifying the authority of the Law of the Father),<sup>122</sup> and the child as a subject represents itself in the field of the Other, of language. However, the subject can never be fully represented in speech, since language cannot express the unconscious, which is precisely the repressed and therefore unspeakable desire for the mother. The subject can only represent itself at the cost of dividing itself, into conscious and unconscious, self and Other. What gets repressed into the unconscious is that which recalls the subject’s lack of unity; the unconscious therefore represents a threat to that sense of unity.

Furthermore, as the conscious subject seeks to represent itself in the field of the Other, it can only do so by coming after the fact (after the word), by which time the unconscious subject has already become something else (Lacan refers to this situation as the “future anterior” (1977:304)). This means that when the conscious subject enunciates “I” and thereby becomes presence, the unconscious subject has already moved beyond that “I” and become something else; the spoken subject has now become absence. In other words, the spoken subject is constantly fading, becoming loss or lack (Lacan calls this process “aphanisis”, the constant eclipsing of the subject). Until the mirror stage, the child was pre-linguistic and pre-lack. Entry into the Symbolic order is entry into language and into lack. Language itself is therefore irreducibly based on and linked with the concept of lack. As Toril Moi puts it,

The speaking subject that says ‘I am’ is in fact saying ‘I am he (she) who has

lost something' – and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother and the world. [...] To speak as subject is therefore the same as to represent the existence of repressed desire: the speaking subject *is* lack, and this is how Lacan can say that the subject is that which it is not. (1985:99-100)

To counteract this fading or eclipsing, the subject will attempt to recapture its vision of itself as a unified being, the idealised image of the Imaginary. However, since its desire for the mother is taboo, these libidinal drives must be repressed into the unconscious, and the child must therefore seek an alternative moment of imagined unity to compensate for its sense of loss and the lack represented by the mother (her lack of the phallus, and the absence of the mother, the separation from the mother following the mirror stage). However, this image of the ego-ideal is a delusional one, the self seen from outside, in a mirror, as both same and other (*l'objet petit-a*). Thus the attempt to reproduce that unified image of the Imaginary is to produce a *mis*recognition of the self. It also produces alienation: the ideal image is the one the (m)other is holding up to be seen in the mirror, so the child identifies with what it assumes is the mother's perception of it ("I am who my mother desires me to be"). Identification is only possible in relation to another, which exposes a gap between the idealised image and the subject. The child is therefore a divided self – divided between the ideal image and the need for its subjectivity to be confirmed by another. It is at this point that the conjunction occurs between the Imaginary and the Symbolic – the *suture* between the Imaginary and the Symbolic – to close the gap opened up by this breach in the subject's identity between conscious and unconscious, recognition and misrecognition. The "aphanisis" or constant fading of the subject prompts the child to seek compensation in an idealised image which will fend off the lack. Such an idealised image, whose prototype is the image in the mirror, produces a misrecognition of the self, thereby effecting the stitching together, the suture, of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Suture is the process by which the ego strives to stitch these two orders – the Imaginary and the Symbolic – together, to prevent the rupture between them from splitting the psyche in two. And since subjectivity, the unconscious and language are inextricably linked, this suture manifests itself on the level of discourse. As Jacques-Alain Miller puts it, "Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse: [...] it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in" (qtd. in Heath

1981:84).

### Suture, enunciation and rhetoric

Suture therefore occurs at the level of enunciation. According to Emile Benveniste (1971), “enunciation” is the act of making a speech act, the “enunciator” is the person making the speech act, and the “enounced” is the verbal result of that speech act. The enunciation is a time-bound speech act, whereas the enounced is outside the temporal flow, being the atemporal result of that speech act. Benveniste makes a distinction between the subject of the enunciation (the enunciator) and the subject of the enounced. This distinction corresponds to the division of the self caused by the inevitable co-existence of the unconscious with language, the unconscious being the field of exclusion entailed by signification. The fact that the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enounced are not identical can be seen from the example of the “liar paradox”. If an enunciator says “I am lying”, then it follows that if the enunciator is telling the truth then the subject of the enounced is lying. They are not both lying because the subject of the enunciation, being time-bound, has already moved on, whereas the subject of the enounced is not time-bound. On the other hand, if the subject of the enounced is telling the truth then the subject of the enunciation is lying. This adds an extra layer of difference between the enunciation and the enounced: as well as their temporal difference, they also have different subjects. This fact can be directly related to Lacan’s concept of the “future anterior” – when the conscious subject enunciates “I” and thereby becomes presence, the unconscious subject has already moved beyond that “I” and become something else, so that the spoken subject has now become absence. As the conscious subject seeks to represent itself in language, it can only do so at the cost of coming after the word, by which time the unconscious subject has already moved on. This means that the conscious subject of the enunciation utters “I” and in becoming situated as “I” becomes the subject of the enounced, and thereby becomes presence. But the unconscious subject is already beyond that “I” and so the subject of the enunciation now becomes absence. As Susan Hayward puts it, “To say ‘I’, therefore, is not to be it, because the subject of the enunciation (who in enunciating is making a *time-bound* speech act) has already gone past it and is saying and being something else” (2000:99-100). To believe that both subjects are identical, when in fact they are not, is to misrecognise the self, analogous to the way in which

the child misrecognises itself as a unified being in the mirror.

The cinematic “system of the suture” likewise exists at the level of the enunciation of a film, as Dayan has stated:

filmic enunciation, the system that negotiates the viewer’s access to the film – the system that ‘speaks’ the fiction [...] is built so as to mask the ideological origin and nature of cinematographic statements. (1974:22).

The system of the suture therefore does not analyse the way that ideology is embodied at the level of the fiction of a film (for example, in what the characters say or do, or in the narrative of the film); rather, it analyses the system of enunciation by which individual shots are transformed into cinematographic statements. In Dayan’s words,

The system of the suture is to classical cinema what verbal language is to literature. Linguistic studies stop when one reaches the level of the sentence. In the same way, the system [of the suture] [...] leads only from the shot to the cinematographic statement. Beyond the statement, the level of enunciation stops. The level of fiction begins. (1974:22)

The level of enunciation is of course the same level on which montage exists as a method. It is significant in this respect that Kuleshov frequently referred to montage as the basic “language” of cinema. For example, Kuleshov describes how

[i]f one has an idea-phrase, a fragment of the story, a link in the chain of events comprising its plot, then this idea should be expressed, laid out in shot-signs as if they were bricks. A poet places one word after another in a definite rhythm, like one brick after another. Cemented together by him, the word-images produce complex notions. Shots, too, like conventional signs or Chinese characters, can produce images and concepts. The editing (montage) of shots is equivalent to the construction of entire phrases. (1987:164)

It is important not to take Kuleshov’s claim to have discovered the “language” of cinematography too seriously. Kuleshov had rather crude ideas concerning the nature of language, and seems to have meant only that montage was the correct method of piecing together the basic elements of cinema (i.e. the individual shots or montage fragments) into coherent cinematographic statements. This is not logically equivalent to claiming that cinema is a specific language system (*langue*, in Saussurian terminology), still less is it equivalent to claiming to have

discovered that actual language system. As Metz has repeatedly asserted, cinema is a language (*langage*) but not a language system (*langue*) (1982a:105,116,224,n). What Metz says of Eisenstein's theoretical formulations can therefore also be said of Kuleshov's writings on cinema: "His thoughts on language systems [...] will have to be restated in terms of language" (1982a:40,n). It is also worth bearing in mind the point Aumont makes when he says,

it seems to me very unlikely that this conceptual distinction between the language-system [*langue*] and language [*langage*] could have been made by [Russian] filmmakers in any case. It is all the more unlikely because the Russian term *yazyk*, which means *langue*, can also, in many cases, be translated as *langage* (and designate, in fact, a language situation in general). When Eisenstein, or Vertov, uses the term 'cine-language,' he should not necessarily be taken at his linguistic word. (1987:34)

Eisenstein also used a rather lax definition of "language" when he claimed in 1926 that

[o]ur understanding of cinema is now entering its 'second literary period'. The phase of approximation to the symbolism of *language*. Speech. Speech that conveys a symbolic sense (i.e. not literal), a 'figurative quality', to a completely concrete material meaning through [...] *contextual confrontation*, i.e. also through *montage*. (Eisenstein 1988:80; original emphasis)

As Aumont has pointed out, Eisenstein should not necessarily be taken "at his linguistic word" when he makes claims for montage as a "cine-language": "Never does he confuse the film image, the fragment (the 'shot'), with a word; nor does he ever confuse any assembly of fragments with a verbal type of statement" (1987:35). According to Aumont, Eisenstein "is concerned with a much looser analogy between certain semantic operations in film (related essentially to montage, in the limited, technical sense of the word) and certain 'figures' of thought" (1987:158).

The level of the enunciation of a filmic text is also the level on which a film exists as a rhetorical utterance. As Metz has noted,

Rhetoric in fact originally covered all the techniques of coded acts of utterance, and reached its limit only in 'poetics' [...]. Poetics was the theory of the fictional (usually *written*), as opposed to that of public speeches in real life situations. (1982b:304,n.17:4; original emphasis)

In terms of the traditional division of labour between rhetoric and poetics outlined by Metz, rhetoric can be assigned to the level of the enunciation of a filmic text (the same level on which the system of the suture operates) while poetics can be assigned to the level of the fiction.

### The system of the suture and classical cinema

This “system of the suture” was first applied to film theory by Jean-Pierre Oudart in 1969 (Oudart 1978), as a way of understanding the process by which the spectator is stitched into the film text using the Lacanian concept of “suture”. Oudart (and, following him, Dayan (1974)) placed special emphasis on certain basic filmic codes as being mechanisms by which suture is achieved; in particular the system of shot/reverse-angle shot was put forward as the paradigmatic code of filmic suture.

Oudart and Dayan outline the process of suturing as having three basic stages. At first, the spectator feels the same *jouissance* upon encountering a cinematic image as the child felt at seeing its own image in the mirror. The cinematic image at first appears to be complete and unified, just as the child’s image in the mirror first appeared to it. However, as Metz has pointed out, there is one important difference between the mirror stage of infant development and the adult spectator’s encounter with the cinematic image:

So, is this the mirror stage [...]? Yes, to a large extent [...]. And yet, not quite. For what the child sees in the mirror, what he sees as an other who turns into *I*, is after all the image of his own body; so it is still an identification (and not merely a secondary one) with something *seen*. But in traditional cinema, the spectator is identifying only with something *seeing*: his own image does not appear on the screen; the primary identification is no longer constructed around a subject-object, but around a pure, all-seeing and invisible subject, the vanishing point of the monocular perspective which cinema has taken over from painting. (1982b:97)

In other words, the spectator’s body is not visible on the screen, so that instead of identifying with their own unified body they identify instead with their own unified *look*. As Metz describes,

the spectator is absent from the screen *as perceived*, but also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even ‘all-present’ as *perceiver*. At

every moment I am in the film by my look's caress. (1982b:54; original emphasis)

The spectator's identification with his own look leads directly to his identification with the camera's point of view:

as he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (=framing) determines the vanishing point. (Metz 1982b:49)

In Jean-Louis Baudry's words, "The ideological mechanism at work in the cinema seems thus to be concentrated in the relationship between the camera and the subject" (1999:354). The title of Vertov's self-reflexive film *The Man with a Movie Camera* indicates that one of the purposes of that film is to investigate and to question that relationship.

This substitution of the look in place of the body is only possible if the original mirror stage of development has already been experienced. Metz has pointed out that

the reflection of the own body has disappeared. The cinema spectator is not a child and the child really at the mirror stage (from around six to around eighteen months) would certainly be incapable of 'following' the simplest of films. Thus, what *makes possible* the spectator's absence from the screen – or rather the intelligible unfolding of the film despite that absence – is the fact that the spectator has already known the experience of the mirror (of the true mirror), and is thus able to constitute a world of objects without having first to recognise himself within it. (1982b:46; original emphasis)

The Symbolic order is therefore already present alongside the Imaginary while watching the cinematic image: "The imaginary of the cinema presupposes the symbolic, for the spectator must first of all have known the primordial mirror" (Metz 1982b:57). This co-existence of the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders means that after the initial Imaginary *jouissance*, the spectator becomes aware of the limits of the cinematic image – the frame surrounding the image – and thereby becomes aware of the unseen and absent off-screen space, whose absence is always present (so to speak). This awareness threatens the spectator's imaginary unity with the viewpoint of the camera. The spectator begins to wonder whose look is framing the image, whose viewpoint this actually is. In Oudart's words,

In a hypothetical and purely mythical period [...] space was still a pure expanse of *jouissance*, and the spectator was offered objects literally without anything coming between them as a screen and thus prohibiting the capture of the objects. Suddenly however, prohibition is there in the guise of the screen; its presence first puts an end to the spectator's fascination, to his capture by the unreal. Its perception represents the threshold at which the image is abolished and denounced as unreal, before then being reborn, metamorphosized by the perception of its boundaries. (1978:42)

This absence, the lack of a point of view, felt by the spectator is analogous to the division or wound in the subject's identity between absence and presence, same and other, which had opened up in the mirror stage. In Dayan's words, "Thus: to any filmic field defined by the camera corresponds *another* field from which an absence emanates" (1974:29). Oudart has personified this process in terms of an "Absent One" who haunts the cinematic image: "Every filmic field is echoed by an absent field, the place of a character who is put there by the viewer's imaginary, which we shall call the Absent One" (1978:36).

It is at this point that the seamlessness and unity of the cinematic image is threatened. The image begins to reveal its true nature as an illusion, to reveal film as a system of signs and codes, a field of conflict and contradiction. As Baudry puts it, "Both specular tranquility and the assurance of one's own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that is, of the inscription of the film work" (1999:354). It is at this dangerous juncture that the system of the suture operates to prevent the threatened exposure of film's signifying practices and to stitch the spectator back into his or her imaginary unity with the cinematic image. According to Oudart (1978), the canonical suturing device in classical narrative cinema is the shot/reverse-angle shot, in which the second shot reveals to the spectator that the first shot was actually seen from the point of view of the character seen in the second shot. The absent off-screen space thereby retrospectively becomes on-screen space, so that absence has become presence and lack has become plenitude. The artifice of cinema has been successfully concealed once more and the narrative can now continue, the spectator having been safely reinscribed back into the filmic discourse. "The reverse shot has 'sutured' the hole opened in the spectator's imaginary relationship with the filmic field by his perception of the absent-one" (Dayan 1974:30). Dayan also claims that this process of suturing also produces the meaning of shot one of the shot/reverse-



angle shot dyad: “In this way, shot two establishes itself as the signified of shot one. By substituting for the other field, shot two becomes the meaning of shot one” (1974:30). This process of establishing the meaning of a shot is therefore a retrospective one, as Dayan has emphasised:

Within this system, the meaning of a shot depends on the next shot. [...] The character presented in shot two does not replace the absent-one corresponding to shot two, but the absent-one corresponding to shot one. The suture is always chronologically posterior to the corresponding shot; i.e., when we finally know what the other field was, the filmic field is no longer on the screen. The meaning of a shot is given retrospectively, it does not meet the shot on the screen, but only in the memory of the spectator.

The process of reading the film (perceiving its meaning) is therefore a retroactive one, wherein the present modifies the past. (1974:31)

Oudart has pointed out that there is also an anticipatory as well as retroactive aspect to this process: “the suture [...] has a dual effect. On the one hand it is essentially retroactive on the level of the signified [...]. On the other hand, it is anticipatory on the level of the signifier” (1978:37). By this means, the system of the suture generates the process of enunciation by which raw footage is transformed into cinematographic statements: “The system of the absent-one distinguishes cinematography, a system producing meaning, from any impressed strip of film (mere footage)” (1974:29), while at the same time concealing this process of enunciation behind the reality effect. This is similar to the way in which montage places the significance or meaning of a shot in its interaction with other shots rather than inhering in the actual shot itself. The individual shot is incomplete as a signifying unit both in the montage method and in the system of the suture. Montage finds the meaning *between* the shots (as in Vertov’s “theory of intervals”) or even *above* the shots (as in Eisenstein’s “dialectical montage”). However, whereas the montage method does not attempt to conceal the film’s method of construction, the system of the suture is used to produce an effect of seamlessness in order to allow the spectator to be easily stitched into the narrative. As Metz puts it, “the basic characteristic of this kind of discourse, and the very principle of its effectiveness as discourse, is precisely that it obliterates all traces of the enunciation, and masquerades as story” (1982b:91). Classical cinema tries to erase all traces of the enunciation, to hide its ideological rhetoric, so that the narrative seems to speak itself and the ideology inscribed in the

discourse is naturalised and seems to have no origin. As Oudart puts it, the system of the suture “makes the cinema a unique form of speech, one which speaks itself” (1978:43). This is where the Symbolic and Imaginary orders come together in order to produce the reality effect, the illusionism of classical cinema: “The conjunction of the language system and the imaginary produces the effect of reality: the referential dimension of language” (Dayan 1974:25). It is important to note that the reality effect, the peculiar impression that we are experiencing reality while watching a film, derives from the subjectivity constructed in the psyche of the spectator by the system of the suture rather than from the content or formal organisation of the filmic text itself.

There is an intriguing parallel between the retrospective creation of the meaning of a shot or montage fragment and the philosopher C. S. Peirce’s idea that every thought is a sign without meaning in itself until that sign is interpreted by a subsequent thought, which he called an “interpretant”, so that the meaning of a thought is arrived at by retrospectively interpreting the thought as a sign of a determining object. The meaning of our thoughts is therefore established retrospectively, just like the meaning of a shot in the system of the suture:

From the proposition that every thought is a sign, it follows that every thought must address itself to some other, must determine some other, since that is the essence of a sign. This, after all, is but another form of the familiar axiom, that in intuition, i.e. in the immediate present, there is no thought, or, that all which is reflected upon has past. [...] To say, therefore, that thought cannot happen in an instant, but requires a time, is but another way of saying that every thought must be interpreted in another, or that all thought is in signs. (Peirce 1991:49)

Furthermore, it may be possible to connect Peirce’s idea with Eisenstein’s belief that montage form is actually a reconstruction of the processes of human thought itself:

*Cinema seems to us by its specific character to reproduce the phenomena according to all the indications of the method that derives from the reflection of reality in the movement of the psychic process.* (There is not one specific feature of cinematic phenomenon or method that does not correspond to the specific form of the process of human psychic activity.) [...] That is part of what we understand by ‘montage form as the reconstruction of the thought process’. (Eisenstein 1988:248; original emphasis)

Eisenstein hoped to base such a montage reconstruction of the thought process on his use of “inner monologue”, whose theoretical basis was to be the concept of “pre-logical thought” as developed by Lévy-Bruhl. Unfortunately for Eisenstein, Lévy-Bruhl himself later abandoned his own concept of “pre-logical thought” (Aumont 1987:64) and this fact, together with the dangerous accusations of “Idealism” and subjectivism which Eisenstein’s suggestion attracted, led to the concept of inner monologue being very short-lived in Eisenstein’s theoretical work and to its complete absence (with the possible exception of the unfinished *Bezhin Meadow*) in his actual films. Rather than basing the montage reconstruction of the thought process on a dubious linguistic model of “pre-logical thought”, it might be given a more secure theoretical foundation by basing it on a semiotic model using the Peircean categorisation of thoughts as signs whose meaning is produced retrospectively, in an analogous way to the method by which the system of the suture retrospectively produces the meaning of a shot. The enunciation of a montage film (i.e. the way meaningful cinematographic statements are constructed out of montage fragments) could then in principle reconstruct the enunciation of human thought (i.e. the way meaning is constructed out of fragmentary thought-signs). Such an analysis might help to illuminate the way in which montage cinema, especially through the concepts of “intellectual montage” and “inner monologue” proposed by Eisenstein, actually does (or does not) imitate or reconstruct human thought processes.

The cinematic system of the suture itself, as presented by Oudart and Dayan, has been subjected to criticism or modification by critics such as William Rothman (1975), Kaja Silverman (1999) and Stephen Heath (1981), among others. In particular, Rothman and Heath have separately argued that Oudart and Dayan placed too much emphasis on the shot/reverse-angle shot as the canonical device of the system of the suture. As Rothman points out, this is not a particularly dominant shot in classical cinema.<sup>123</sup> Dayan himself mentions this fact in a footnote towards the end of his article, almost as an afterthought:

shot/reverse shot is itself merely one figure in the system(s) of classical cinema. In this initial moment of the study of enunciation in film, we have chosen it as a privileged example of the way in which the origin of the glance is displaced in order to hide the film’s production of meaning. (1974:31,n)

However, he does not take the opportunity to propose ways of extending his analysis of the system of the suture to encompass a wider array of the devices

of classical cinema. This left his analysis vulnerable to attack by critics such as Rothman, who treats the shot/reverse-angle shot as the only or at least the primary device by which Dayan proposed that the spectator is sutured into the filmic text. However, while Rothman uses this point to attack the general validity of the system of the suture, Heath argues instead that the concept of the cinematic suture must actually be extended so that the shot/reverse-angle shot is seen as merely one particular device of suture and not necessarily the most important one (though it is a particularly “obvious” one which makes the presentation of the system of the suture relatively straightforward, which is the probable reason for Oudart’s and Dayan’s valorisation of that device). The process of suturing the spectator into the filmic text would then be seen to be the outcome of a wide array of devices consistent with continuity editing. In fact, Oudart had actually noted that “[t]he ideal chain of a sutured discourse would be one which is articulated into figures which it is no longer appropriate to call shot/reverse-shot” (1978:40). Silverman (1999) goes even further than Heath in relating the system of the suture to filmic narrative in a broad sense, including even such elements of film discourse as lighting, for example. According to Silverman, narrative itself is indispensable to the system of the suture, as it provides the spectator with a subject position with respect to the filmic text. This extension of the system of the suture would place it no longer purely on the level of the enunciation of the filmic text, but also on the level of the fiction, whereas Dayan specifically located it exclusively on the level of enunciation, as “the system that negotiates the viewer’s access to the film – the system that ‘speaks’ the fiction”, or rather which “speaks the codes on which the fiction depends” (1974:22). Such an extension of the system of the suture to the level of the narrative of a film would, it seems to me, directly contradict Dayan’s assertion that the system of the suture “leads only from the shot to the cinematographic statement. Beyond the statement, the level of communication stops. The level of fiction begins” (1974:22). Silverman’s suggestion is therefore highly problematic, and I shall restrict my use of the system of the suture in this thesis only to the level of the enunciation of a filmic text.

### 5.3 Suture, propaganda and rhetoric

The system of the suture, as outlined by Oudart and Dayan, has as its immediate purpose the task of suturing the spectator into the filmic text, thereby creating

the “reality effect” of classical cinema. However, according to Oudart and Dayan, it also has another purpose beyond that of sustaining the illusionism of the filmic text, and that purpose is ideological. I am using the word “ideology” in the Marxist sense in which, in Althusser’s words, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (2008:36). Oudart and Dayan make a connection between the linguistic basis of the subjectivity of the individual established by Lacan and the role of ideology as the discourse which invests a society with meaning, usually a false one, as outlined by Althusser (2008:1-60).

According to Althusser, ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. “Interpellation” is a term coined by Althusser to describe the process by which ideology addresses the (abstract) pre-ideological individual, thereby producing him as a subject.<sup>124</sup> To be interpellated therefore means to identify with a particular idea or identity; to use Althusser’s example, if a policeman shouts a person’s name at them in the street, that person would interpellate that call to mean themselves. In this respect, the way in which the media “speak” to viewers by addressing them (usually as part of a specific demographic or subculture rather than specifically as individuals) is an important source of the media’s persuasive power over the viewers. By recognising that he or she is being spoken to, the spectator engages more deeply with the text and, more importantly, also accepts the social role being offered to him or her, thereby being produced as subjects by the ideology implicit in the media. Interpellation can thus be seen as an important element of the *rhetoric* of the mass media, and also of classical Hollywood cinema.<sup>125</sup>

Individuals are the subjects of social and cultural institutions which Althusser collectively refers to as “ideological state apparatuses” (ISAs). Althusser argued that the individual is interpellated as a subject by the ideologies embodied in such ISAs such as the education system, religious institutions, the police, the family and the mass media. Cinema is another of these ISAs, and has the same ideological functioning as other ISAs: it interpellates the spectator, thereby constituting the spectator as a subject. A film projects ideal images in front of us in the form of movie stars (similar to the infant’s ego-ideal in the mirror) and a seamless pseudo-reality, produced by the system of the suture, that conceals the illusory nature of its imaginary unity. Film therefore functions metonymically for the imagined unity of the ego-ideal and as such allows us to (falsely) re-enter the Imaginary order by identifying ourselves with that ego-ideal. Dayan argues that

because the system of the suture renders a film's signifying practices invisible to the spectator, his or her ability to read or decode the film is limited. This allows the ideological effect of the film – its interpellation of the spectator as a subject – to slip by unnoticed. The ideological bias of the film seems to be *natural* to the spectator, a pre-existing part of reality itself and therefore beyond thought or question. As Heath puts it, "Ideology is *in* the suture" (1981:14). The illusionism of classical cinema, the reality effect created by the suturing process, plays a crucial role in this naturalisation of ideology. In Hayward's words, "Cinema is an ideological apparatus by nature of its very seamlessness. We do not see how it produces meaning – it renders it invisible, naturalizes it" (2000:194). Dayan has summarised this process with admirable clarity:

This invisible functioning of the figurative codes can be defined as a "naturalization": the impression of reality produced testifies that the figurative codes are "natural" (instead of being ideological products). It imposes as "truth" the vision of the world entertained by a certain class. [...] This exploitation of the imaginary, this utilization of the subject is made possible by the presence of a system which Oudart calls "representation." (1974:26)

The ideology of a film can therefore be seen to exist not merely on the level of the fiction, the narrative of the film (i.e. what the characters say or do, or the sequence of events shown), but on the level of the enunciation of the filmic text itself, in the process by which fragments of raw film footage are transformed into coherent and meaningful cinematographic statements. The spectator is therefore not free to agree or disagree with that ideology, since he or she is never conscious of its nature *as* ideology. As Dayan puts it,

By means of the suture, the film-discourse presents itself as a product without a producer, a discourse without an origin. It speaks. Who speaks? Things speak for themselves and of course, they tell the truth. Classical cinema establishes itself as the ventriloquist of ideology. (1974:31)

The objection could be raised that this position overstates the extent to which the spectator is enthralled to the reality effect generated by the system of the suture and that in fact, in Plantinga's words,

When viewing a film, we are aware that what we see is a representation, and not the actual world [...] the realist film spectator often rejects representations with which she does not sympathize. (1997:216-17).

This is an important point. The reality effect is indeed far from being a full-blown delusion in the mind of the spectator, and is actually a rather complex process, as Metz has pointed out:

It is understood that the audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it ‘knows’ that the screen presents no more than a fiction. [...] Any spectator will tell you that he ‘doesn’t believe it’, but everything happens as if there were nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really would ‘believe in it’. [...] In other words, [...] since it is ‘accepted’ that the audience is incredulous, who is it *who is credulous* and must be maintained in his credulousness by the perfect organisation of the machinery (of the machination)? (1982b:72; original emphasis)

Metz uses the psychoanalytic concept of disavowal to conceptualise the process by which the spectator is simultaneously credulous and incredulous towards the diegetic illusion produced by the system of the suture, the “reality effect”:

This credulous person is, of course, another part of ourselves, he is still seated *beneath* the incredulous one, or in his heart, it is he who continues to believe, who disavows what he knows [...]. But by a symmetrical and simultaneous movement, the incredulous person disavows the credulous one; no one will admit that he is duped by the ‘plot’. (1982b:72; original emphasis)

Metz also presents the device of the “film within a film” as being closely connected with the complex process of disavowal which accompanies the reality effect in cinema. He claims that the “film within a film” device

downgear[s] the mechanism of our belief-unbelief and anchor[s] it in several stages, hence more strongly: the included film was an illusion, so the including film (the film as such) was not, or was somewhat less so. (1982b:74)

The role of the “film within a film” device in a movie which does *not* use the reality effect is of course very different. In Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera*, we see the diegetic audience watching the movie which we are watching and in which they themselves appear. Such self-reflexivity is not being used by Vertov to reinforce the credulity of the real audience towards the diegetic illusion, but rather the reverse: to emphasise the existence of the movie as an object in the real world (a “film-object” as Vertov called it) rather than as a transparent window into an illusionistic diegetic world.

As far as the involuntary nature of the operation of ideology through suture is concerned, it is clear that though it may be involuntary it is not immediate, overwhelming or irreversible in its operation, due to the complex process of disavowal taking place in the psyche of the spectator. The actual process by which ideology is naturalised in the mind of the spectator was probably described best by Brecht when he analysed his own reactions while watching the pro-imperialist American film *Gunga Din* (1939), based on the Kipling poem.<sup>126</sup> The film presented the Indians of the British Raj as being either comical (when loyal to their British masters) or wicked (when hostile to them). The British characters, on the other hand, were presented as being honest and good-humoured. When an Indian sacrificed his life in order for his own compatriots to be defeated by the British, Brecht described how the audience applauded, and admitted that he too felt like applauding. He had even laughed at all the right places in the film. But *at the same time* he recognised that the film's representation of the Indians and the British was completely false and that in fact *Gunga Din* could instead be seen as a traitor to his own people. Brecht concluded that:

Obviously artistic appreciation of this sort is not without effects. It weakens the good instincts and strengthens the bad, it contradicts true experience and spreads misconceptions, in short it perverts our picture of the world. There is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way or other affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences. (Brecht 1964:151)

In other words, art is always-already ideological in its very forms, and to some extent or other fulfils a propagandistic function.

Another possible objection to Oudart's and Dayan's position concerning the operation of ideology through the suture, one that was applied initially to the assertion of Jean-Louis Baudry (1999) that bourgeois ideology is implicit in the cinematographic apparatus itself, is that, in Plantinga's words, "Despite his reference to historical origins, Baudry assumes a universal, ahistorical ideological effect for the motion picture apparatus" (1997:42-43), as in fact do Oudart and Dayan. Plantinga believes that "[s]uch broad claims about effect emerge from *ideological formalism*, a formalism that asserts universal ideological effects for certain forms of cinema" (1997:217; original emphasis). The best counterargument to this objection is undoubtedly that of Althusser, who asserted that "ideology has no history". Althusser did not mean by this that particular ideologies have no



history; clearly, ideologies are determined by material, economic and historical factors. Instead, Althusser claimed that ideology in general (as distinct from particular ideologies) has no history, not in the negative sense defined by Marx (i.e. that it has no history because its history lies outside itself, in the economic and class development of society) but in the positive sense that

it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e. an *omni-historical* reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we call history [...]. (Althusser 2008:35; original emphasis)

In other words, ideology is always with us, though it may take the form of differing particular ideologies which are historically and socially determined. It is in this sense that Oudart and Dayan (and Baudry) are justified in “assum[ing] a universal, ahistorical ideological effect for the motion picture apparatus”.

It may have been his awareness of this effect which prompted Vertov to denounce commercial cinema as a sedative drug, echoing Marx’s comment about religion being an ideological “opium of the people”:

The most powerful weapon and the most powerful technology are in the hands of the European and American film-bourgeoisie. Three-fourths of the human race is stupefied by the opium of bourgeois film-dramas. (Vertov 1984:39)

Vertov clearly regarded Hollywood movies as a form of propaganda, whose purpose was to sedate the audience and to inculcate bourgeois values and ideology into the proletarian audience; in other words, to act as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus. In this respect, Vertov regarded the importing of European and American commercial movies into the Soviet Union during the 1920s as ideologically extremely damaging to the Communist cause. He regarded such movies as a form of bourgeois propaganda, a subtle poison working on the consciousness of the Soviet proletariat. This poison was being administered through the system of the suture. Metz has summed up the way in which the “reality effect” (which he calls “plausibility”), continuity editing and propaganda all work together to naturalise the ideology of the classical film:

The plausible work [...] attempts to persuade itself, and to persuade the public, that the conventions that force it to restrict its possibilities are not laws of discourse or rules of “writing” – are not in fact conventions at all

– and that their effect, observable in the content of the work, is in reality the effect of the nature of things and derives from the intrinsic character of the subject represented. The plausible work believes itself to be, and wants us to believe it to be, directly translatable into terms of reality. It is then that the plausible attains its full use: Its function is to *make real*. The Plausible [...] is therefore that suspicious arsenal of devices and “tricks” whose purpose is to naturalize discourse and to hide control [...]. (1982a:249)

However, it might be objected that Hollywood cinema is not in fact a form of propaganda and that its only function is to provide entertainment to a mass audience. In fact, unequivocally identifying the mass media, including cinema, as a form of propaganda is problematic for reasons which O’Shaughnessy has outlined:

Attempts to stigmatise the mass media as propaganda are usually doomed to failure because of the ideological elusiveness of much of their content. [...] Entertainment is both an important source of propaganda and encapsulates the conundrum of its definition. [...] Classification as propaganda may represent the coercive imposition of a rigid interpretation that the facts do not support if ‘facts’ are taken to include the complete ensemble – narrative structure, surface decoration of texts, stylistic devices, dialogue, meaning brought to the role by actors from their previous roles. The result is a complexity which does not so conveniently sustain classification as propaganda. (2004:27-28)

As O’Shaughnessy states, the content of a Hollywood film (that is, the level of its fiction rather than of its enunciation) is usually free of any overt propaganda or political rhetoric. However, the argument of Oudart and of Dayan is precisely that the ideological effect of a classical film on its audience is not primarily by means of the fiction or content of the film, but by means of its enunciation, through the system of the suture. The suturing process operates in an analogous way to the Althusserian ideological interpellation of the individual as a subject. The fiction of a classical film may not be overtly ideological, but its enunciation is *always* ideological. It is this fact which enables classical Hollywood cinema to function as a highly successful form of propaganda, specifically as what Ellul has called “integration propaganda”. As Ellul has said, “these activities are propaganda because they seek to adapt the individual to a society, to a living

standard, to an activity. They serve to make him conform, which is the aim of all propaganda” (1973:xiii).<sup>127</sup> It is not just so-called totalitarian regimes which employ propaganda, as O’Shaughnessy has pointed out:

Propaganda is ubiquitous. While such saturation is an obvious and definitive characteristic of totalitarian regimes, in democracies it is more concealed, because it is more sophisticated and naturalised as part of supposedly objective mass media communication. (2004:244)

Indeed, it could be argued that propaganda in democratic societies – particularly classical Hollywood cinema – is actually far more successful than in totalitarian societies, precisely because it conceals and naturalises its ideology and therefore avoids the tedium and the hectoring quality of more overtly propagandising films. As Jowett and O’Donnell put it,

American films managed to develop a most potent combination of being able to entertain and propagandize at the same time, thus “getting the message across” while also attracting the large audiences that obvious propaganda and documentary films were seldom able to do. (1992:96)

O’Shaughnessy, following David Thorburn (1988), has claimed that the Western mass media are in fact what he calls “consensus narratives”:

Television and film are ‘consensus narratives’, so created by myriad interactions between the text, its ancestors, competitors, authors, audience and socio-economic order. This communality explains their unoriginality and also their power to articulate the wisdom of the community: ‘that inherited understanding is no simple ideological construct, but a matrix for values and assumptions that undergo a continuous testing, rehearsal and revision in the culturally licensed experience of consensus narrative’. (2004:29)

The concept of “consensus narratives” is clearly almost indistinguishable from that of “integration propaganda”, as defined by Ellul (1973:75). The “wisdom of the community” which such media texts supposedly embody is, more often than not, little more than a vague articulation of the hegemonic ideology of society, in Gramsci’s sense of the term, and its nature as ideology is concealed behind the naturalising process of the suture. Furthermore, the process of “testing, rehearsal and revision” which Thorburn describes sounds very like the process by which “horizontal propaganda” achieves its hold over the minds of its recipients, as described by Ellul (1973:81-84). In fact, O’Shaughnessy even adds the afterthought

that “if the meaning of such cultural texts were clearer they might indeed function as propaganda” (2004:29). I would suggest that the lack of clarity which O’Shaughnessy refers to in these cultural texts is actually due to the fact that the ideology is embodied in their enunciation rather than in their fiction, and is thus not (or very seldom) explicitly stated. Their operation as propaganda is therefore concealed rather than open, yet is no less real for that. O’Shaughnessy even ends by admitting that “a consistent theme of Hollywood down the years has been integration propaganda (in Ellul’s terminology)” (2004:207). So much for the “wisdom of the community” embodied in “consensus narratives” then: as Stuart Hall has noted, because the majority of people have “little real, day-to-day access to decisions and information, commonsense ideologies are usually a composite reflection of the dominant ideologies, operating at a passive and diffused level in society” (Hall 1988:362-63). In Jowett and O’Donnell’s words,

One could argue that movies do, in fact, succeed as propaganda vehicles in a much more subtle way, by presenting one set of values as the only viable set. Over a period of years, these values can both reflect and shape society’s norms. (1992:90)

In fact, the propaganda aspect of Hollywood movies was recognised and asserted by Edward Bernays with admirable honesty when he wrote as early as 1928 that “[t]he American motion picture is the greatest unconscious carrier of propaganda in the world today. It is a great distributor for ideas and opinions” (2005:166).

## Chapter 6

# Montage Cinema and the System of the Suture

The system of the suture, as outlined in the previous chapter, can provide a new perspective on the montage method itself as a process of enunciation which transforms raw footage into cinematographic statements. Furthermore, it can provide a new way of understanding the difference between Soviet montage cinema and classical continuity cinema at the level of enunciation rather than merely in terms of their technical procedures or political content. In particular, an analysis of the ways in which montage cinema subverts the suturing process, foregrounding its own enunciation and revealing its own ideological operations, could shed light on the rhetorical functioning of Soviet montage cinema as a form of political propaganda. Such a study would be an analysis of the social and political effectivity of Soviet montage cinema rather than of its set of aesthetic norms; that is, a functional analysis rather than a normative analysis of montage cinema, in Bürger's sense (1984:87).

### 6.1 Suture and the Kuleshov Effect

Interpreting the Kuleshov Effect experiment which, as Bazin said, “sums up perfectly the properties of montage” (2005:25) in terms of the system of the suture has two potential benefits. Firstly, the system of the suture can potentially reveal new ways of understanding the psychoanalytic origin of the Kuleshov Effect, and can perhaps make it more plausible that such an effect does indeed exist, which is a question which has been raised repeatedly over the years – for example, by

Aumont (1986) – and has been inconclusively investigated by Prince and Hensley (1992). And secondly, the Kuleshov Effect (presuming that it exists) can potentially illuminate aspects of the system of the suture itself.

There is an obvious point of similarity between the system of the suture and the Kuleshov Effect: they both imply that the individual shot in itself is incomplete as a unit of signification, so that the meaning of a given shot does not inhere in that shot itself but is created by adjacent shots in a suturing process. As far as the suturing process in classical cinema is concerned, in Dayan's words,

within the system of the suture, the absent-one represents the fact that no shot can constitute by itself a complete statement. The absent-one stands for that which any shot necessarily lacks in order to attain meaning: another shot. [...] Within this system, the meaning of a shot depends on the next shot. [...] The process of reading a film (perceiving its meaning) is therefore a retroactive one, wherein the present modifies the past. (1974:30-31)

However, as I hope to demonstrate, with the montage method this process can in principle operate in either temporal direction, whereas the system of the suture operates only retrospectively.

Reducing the Kuleshov Effect to its essential two-shot kernel,<sup>128</sup> if shot one is an image of a bowl of soup and shot two is an image of Mozzhukhin's expressionless face, then we can postulate the following process by which meaning is ascribed to the shots:

1. The viewer sees shot one, the bowl of soup. He or she experiences a(n abstract) feeling of hunger, but cannot associate that feeling with themselves, since it is not *their* gaze which frames the image of the soup, but the absent-one's gaze. According to the system of the suture, the viewer asks him- or herself, whose gaze is this? In this particular case the viewer also asks, whose *hunger* is this?

2. The viewer then sees shot two, Mozzhukhin's expressionless face. He or she now understands, by the system of the suture, that it is *Mozzhukhin's* gaze which framed shot one, and it is therefore *his* hunger which the viewer experienced when they saw shot one. The viewer therefore projects his or her own emotional or visceral response to shot one (i.e. a sensation of hunger) onto the absent-one of shot one, who appears in shot two and thereby gives shot one its meaning.

A significant departure from the system of the suture is that shot two also

obtains *its* meaning from shot one – a two-way process is at work. Without the preceding image of the bowl of soup, Mozzhukhin's blank face would be empty of emotional affect and would be meaningless to the viewer. The (abstract) feeling of hunger aroused in the viewer by the sight of shot one has been ascribed to the absent-one of shot one, who appears in shot two; the "lack" of shot two – the blankness of Mozzhukhin's expression – has become plenitude, just as the "lack" of shot one – the unseen absent-one – has become presence. It should be noted that there is also a two-way process of a different sort at work in the system of the suture, as Dayan has emphasised: "On the one hand, a retroactive process organizes the *signified*. On the other hand, an anticipatory process organizes the *signifier*" (1974:31). The two-way process which I am proposing operates in the Kuleshov Effect is distinct from this and should not be conflated with it.

Analysed in this way, it becomes clear that the montage of the Kuleshov Effect depends on more than merely an "appropriation of classical continuity" as Kepley has asserted (1992:138). There is a psychoanalytic basis to the effect, beyond the merely cognitive manipulations implied by Kuleshov's use of classical continuity devices such as matches on eyeline, and so on. Furthermore, the nature of the Kuleshov Effect as enunciation is clarified – film montage, like the system of the suture, exists on the level of enunciation, the level on which raw footage is transformed into cinematographic statements. Viewing the Kuleshov Effect in the light of the system of the suture also makes clearer the way in which the meaning of each shot does not inhere in the shot itself, but in its juxtaposition with adjacent shots in a suturing process.<sup>129</sup> Oudart (1978) and Dayan (1974) have emphasised the coercive nature of the system of the suture – "Oudart insists on the brutality, on the tyranny with which this signification imposes itself on the spectator or, as he puts it, 'transits through him'" (Dayan 1974:31); in other words, the viewer is manipulated by the process of suturing. This is of course also true for the Kuleshov Effect, but in a significantly different way. While the system of the suture attempts to conceal its own artifice – and indeed it can only work if its artifice *is* successfully concealed – the Kuleshov Effect would, in principle, still work even if the montage were not concealed; it does not depend on the reality effect. This "laying bare of the device", as the Russian Formalists called it, leaves open the possibility of subverting the system of the suture by foregrounding the enunciation of the filmic text. However, Kuleshov himself seems not to have taken advantage of that possibility, preferring instead to use montage almost exclusively

as a means of achieving efficiency of discourse rather than to interrupt continuity or disrupt the “reality effect” (Kuleshov 1987:139). It was the later montage film-makers such as Eisenstein, Pudovkin or Vertov who would use the montage method to subvert the suturing process.

There is nothing fundamentally wrong with coercion in itself – after all, material reality itself is coercive in the way it imposes itself upon the individual. However, the system of the suture imposes a false answer to all the viewer’s questions without the viewer’s conscious awareness of that coercive imposition occurring. The system of the suture conceals its own coercive nature behind a seamless narrative which seems to have no enunciation and no enunciator, a narrative which seems to speak itself. What liberates the mind of the spectator from that coercion is not its removal, but the conscious recognition of its existence. In fact, this liberating awareness of coercion is analogous to Frederick Engels’ definition of freedom as being the recognition of necessity; the montage film-makers hoped to induce such a recognition in the minds of their proletarian audience as a vital element in their attempt to politically agitate and thereby liberate the audience. I have explored this idea in greater detail in a published paper (Russell 2005).

Furthermore, the interpretation of the Kuleshov Effect in the light of the system of the suture might actually shed light on the system of the suture itself. For example, the fact that the process of suturing in the Kuleshov Effect also works (assuming that the Kuleshov Effect itself “works” at all) with other images in shot one than just a bowl of soup, leading to different emotions being projected by the spectator onto the same image of Mozzhukhin’s blank face in shot two, serves to emphasise the essential falsity of the system of the suture, the fact that it gives false answers to our questions. The Kuleshov Effect, by enabling us to ascribe many different emotions and feelings to the same image, thereby poses in a particularly acute form the question raised by Dayan, which he describes as the “point of attack” of Oudart’s analysis: “what happens to the spectator-image relation by virtue of the shot-changes peculiar to cinema?” (1974:28).

Moreover, the Kuleshov Effect, when interpreted in the light of the system of the suture, suggests that within that system the present can modify the future as well as the past, in the sense that the meaning of a shot can be determined by a previous shot. For example, whether shot one is of a bowl of soup, a coffin or a beautiful young woman determines which particular emotion the spectator will



ascribe to Mozzhukhin's actually blank expression in shot two, and therefore the meaning of that subsequent shot.

Kuleshov can now be seen as having done more than merely adopt some of the technical continuity devices of classical Hollywood cinema, such as matches on eyeline, to join the fragments of his Mozzhukhin experiment, as Kepley and others have claimed (1992:138). In fact, Kuleshov was also, like Hollywood film-makers, employing the system of the suture to stitch the spectator into the filmic text. However, he was employing it in a slightly modified form, and it is this modification which represents the originality of Kuleshov's approach. He was not trying to subvert the system of the suture, still less trying to break with it, but was extending it and demonstrating some of the ways in which it could be used to unify fragmentary material and give that material meaning by juxtaposition. Before the system of the suture was developed by classical cinema, most film-makers had either avoided cutting their films altogether or had attempted to conceal any unavoidable cuts by masking them with trick photography, as Méliès for example had sometimes done. At this early stage in the development of cinema, the cut was perceived as a threat to the spectator's imaginary identification with the image, as Dayan has noted:

the cinematic succession of images threatens to interrupt or even to expose and to deconstruct the representation system which commands static paintings or photos. [...] The viewer's identification with the subjective function proposed by the painting or photograph is broken again and again during the viewing of a film. (1974:28)

The development of the system of the suture enabled film-makers to cut their films without risking the loss of the *jouissance* of the Imaginary. In fact, the cutting and fragmentation of the image was actually a necessary precursor to the construction of meaning and narrative coherence and the system of the suture was developed to counteract what Burch has called "the unfortunate 'dissociative' effect" (1979:87) caused by such cutting. It can be argued that Kuleshov, in his famous montage experiments of the early 1920s, took this process even further by demonstrating that the cut – even between apparently unrelated or contradictory objects or scenes – was actually indispensable to the creation of meaning out of fragments of film footage that in themselves had no meaning, such as a bowl of soup or Mozzhukhin's blank stare. By demonstrating how montage – the assemblage of autonomous fragments of film footage – could be combined with a modified

suturing process, Kuleshov was indeed “making cinematography”, for the Soviet montage cinema “school” at least, as Pudovkin famously claimed (“We make films – Kuleshov made cinematography” (Kuleshov 1974:41)); that is, he established the system of enunciation by which meaningful cinematographic statements could be constructed out of fragments of raw film footage by the montage method.

## 6.2 Montage cinema: subverting the system of the suture

My analysis of Kuleshov’s Mozzhukhin experiment in the light of the system of the suture has implied that both classical cinema and the Kuleshov Effect experiment use the system of the suture to generate meaning; that is, to produce meaningful cinematographic statements out of raw film footage. It is therefore clear that there are similarities between montage cinema (at least as implemented by its originator Lev Kuleshov) and classical cinema on the level of the enunciation of a filmic text. This similarity is primarily due to the fact that they both employ the system of the suture to a greater or lesser extent, though in significantly different ways. Burch, in his analysis of Soviet montage cinema in terms of its relationship with what he calls the “institutional mode of representation” of classical cinema, has also suggested such a similarity (1979). Burch frames the relationship in terms of the linearisation of the iconographic signifier; that is, the creation of an easily readable discourse out of raw film footage:

the dissection of the tableau into successive fragments (closer shots), each governed by a single signifier, so that each frame would be immediately decipherable (at least in accordance with certain norms of legibility) *at first viewing*. (1979:82; original emphasis)

However, it is also possible to frame the relationship in terms of the system of the suture, thereby emphasising the ideological effects of the discourse of classical cinema. The montage directors were not only following the example of classical cinema’s “institutional mode of representation” (to a greater or lesser extent) by linearising the iconographic signifiers, but were also following its example by using the system of the suture both to stitch the spectator into the filmic text and to simultaneously subvert that suturing process, in the same sort of way that

Kuleshov both made use of the continuity devices of classical cinema and also subverted that continuity in the Kuleshov Effect experiment.

It is important to note that it is impossible to avoid the suturing process to some degree or other, since the suturing is simply the stitching together of the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders, which actually occurs in every meaningful discourse. As Lapsley and Westlake point out, “all texts suture, though they do so differently” (2006:89). It is not my claim that the films of the Soviet montage directors do not suture the spectator into the filmic text; my claim is that they do not do so in the same way as the films of classical cinema, nor to the same extent. In particular, classical cinema has the aim of producing a seamless narrative and an illusionistic “reality effect”, thereby naturalising the ideology embedded in the filmic text. It achieves this aim by suturing the spectator into the filmic text in such a way that the act of enunciation is concealed. The montage film-makers also suture the spectator into the filmic text to some extent – my analysis of Kuleshov’s *Mozzhukhin* experiment in terms of the system of the suture has, I hope, demonstrated this – but they are continually unpicking the stitches of that suture, repeatedly opening up the wound again, opening the gap between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in the spectator’s psyche. This prevents the enunciation of their films from becoming invisible, and it foregrounds the ideological position which the montage method presents to the spectator, as Kuleshov described (1974:185). Far from naturalising that ideological position and slipping it unnoticed into the spectator’s psyche, the montage film-makers (to a greater or lesser extent) wished to make the spectator consciously aware of ideology, to make the spectator consciously choose an ideological position and occupy it. This required that the spectator consciously “reads” the codes of the filmic text – “to read themselves inside it rather than simply being written into it again and again”, to use Burch’s phrase (1979:96) – which can only be made possible by the film-maker refusing to fully suture the spectator into the filmic text.

Moreover, while montage cinema, especially during its original development at the Kuleshov Workshop, may have employed a modified form of the system of the suture in the enunciation of its films in order to produce meaningful cinematographic discourse, that system was progressively challenged and subverted by the montage directors who followed after Kuleshov. Whereas classical cinema embraced the system of the suture and thereby concealed the enunciation of the

filmic text in favour of an illusionistic “reality effect” produced by the suturing of the spectator into the filmic text, the montage film-makers instead foregrounded and made explicit the enunciation of their films.

Their motive in doing this was primarily political: to raise the level of social and political consciousness of the audience by revealing the falsity of bourgeois ideology and, by making the codes by which a film is constructed explicit, to enable the spectator to decode the filmic text, thereby leading to what Vertov called “the communist decoding of the world” itself (1984:42). There is an interesting parallel between this decoding of the filmic text and the process of psychoanalysis by which a patient is made conscious of the hidden codes governing his or her psyche, and by achieving insight into those codes is enabled to gain greater control over his or her life experience. As Heath has pointed out,

it is not surprising that in reaction to Miller’s paper, the psychoanalyst Leclaire should be found eager to insist that the analyst be recognised as, by definition, the person who ‘*does not suture*’. (1981:85)

In this respect, the montage film-makers themselves could be regarded almost as psychoanalysts attempting to “cure” an analysand by refusing to suture that analysand into the text of the analysis.

The montage directors therefore had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the system of the suture – they both utilised it to help give coherence and meaning to their cinematographic statements, and they were simultaneously subverting it to foreground the enunciation of their films. Kuleshov was probably the closest to fully accepting the suturing process, just as he was the closest to the genres of classical Hollywood cinema – his self-styled “Americanitis” itself is symptomatic of this fact. In contrast, Eisenstein always emphasised the necessity of “choos[ing] pieces of shots that do not fit” (Mayer 1972:13), and even Kuleshov’s erstwhile collaborator Pudovkin would frequently “weaken the verisimilitude of the diegetic spatial continuum” (Burch 1979:87). But it was Vertov, of all the montage film-makers, who went furthest in challenging the illusionistic, fictional world created by the system of the suture.

Dayan has presented Jean-Luc Godard as an example of a film-maker who also refuses to suture the spectator into the filmic text (1974:31). While the Soviet montage directors perhaps did not go as far as Godard in breaking the suture and foregrounding the enunciation of their films, they did challenge the suturing process far more than classical cinema habitually does, and the extent

and the means by which they did this is of crucial importance in understanding the nature of Soviet montage cinema as a form of political rhetoric and as a distinct and fundamental challenge to the norms of classical cinema.

### The “trap” of suture, distanciation, and ecstasy

To understand the means by which the system of the suture can be challenged, we can take as a starting-point Dayan’s assertion that

[t]o understand the ideology which the painting conveys, I must avoid providing my own imaginary as a support for that ideology. I must refuse that identification which the painting so imperiously proposes to me.<sup>130</sup>  
(1974:27)

The system of the suture is a “trap” for the psyche of the unwary spectator, an “imperious” system by which a particular ideological view of the world is naturalised and imposed on the spectator. Its method is to induce the identification of the spectator with the camera’s viewpoint and an illusory unification of the spectator’s Imaginary and Symbolic orders by “stitching” him or her into the filmic text. That identification and false unification must, according to Dayan, be challenged and disrupted in order to free the spectator from the trap set by the system of the suture. For example, the absence of an individual hero in *Potemkin* and the substitution of the “mass hero” in his place can be construed as part of Eisenstein’s attempt to prevent the spectator’s absorption or “stitching” into the filmic text by withholding an ego-ideal for the spectator to identify with. Such a denial of identification with an ego-ideal “hero” can also be related to the Brechtian technique of “alienation” or “distanciation” in his epic non-Aristotelian theatre: in both cases, the effect is to prevent the spectator from being absorbed or stitched into the narrative by identifying with the hero, and, by keeping a distance between the spectator and the narrative, to allow the spectator to maintain a conscious awareness of the codes governing the discourse of the play or film, so that the spectator is able (at least in principle) to consciously decode the discourse of the film and be thereby enabled to decode reality itself in a similar way.

In fact, the refusal to entirely suture the spectator into the filmic text has in general many similarities with Brecht’s concept of *Verfremdung*, or distanciation.<sup>131</sup> However, while the concept of distanciation may be applicable to the

films of Vertov, and to some extent the films of Pudovkin, Eisenstein often undermined the suturing process in order to *reduce* the distance between the spectator and the spectacle of the film. As Bordwell has said, “Eisenstein will have nothing of Brechtian ‘distancing’; his conception of sensuous spectacle calls for the spectator to be carried away” (2005:197). The endpoint of this tendency was of course Eisenstein’s concept of “ecstasy”, the dialectical leap out of oneself to a higher level of feeling or consciousness. This ecstasy was, however, closely linked with the rhetorical and agitational aspects of his films. It is likely, as Bordwell has suggested, that Eisenstein’s concept of ecstasy was derived from Longinus’ conception of the sublime in rhetoric:

Genius does not merely persuade an audience but lifts it to ecstasy. The astonishing is always of greater force than the persuasive or the pleasing [...]. That is truly effective which comes with such mighty and irresistible force as to overpower the hearer. (Qtd. in Bordwell 2005:194)

It is easy to see why this concept of ecstasy would be attractive to Eisenstein; the “montage of attractions”, after all, had been designed to “overpower” the spectator with “mighty and irresistible force”. Eisenstein’s understanding of the concept of ecstasy should also be differentiated from the *jouissance* which Lacan describes the infant as experiencing when it (mis)perceives its own unity in a mirror and which Oudart and Dayan claim is felt by a spectator at their imaginary unity with the image, though there are superficial similarities between the two. As Bordwell says, “Ecstasy is similar to [...] a process whereby the concreteness of prelogical thought obliterates distinctions between part and whole, self and other” (2005:194); the *jouissance* of the mirror stage, by contrast, is associated with a *distinction* between the infant’s body and the external world, a distinction the infant is enabled to make for the first time by passing through the mirror stage.

In montage cinema, as in classical cinema, ideology is embedded in the film on the level of enunciation as well as overtly on the level of the fiction or narrative of the film. However, whereas this ideology is concealed in classical cinema – by using the system of the suture to conceal the enunciation itself – in montage cinema the ideology built into the enunciation is made explicit by making the enunciation itself explicit through the disruptive effects of montage. Aumont has implicitly indicated this by suggesting that

Eisenstein could have taken as his own this statement of Tretyakov’s: ‘Ideology is not in the material which art uses, ideology is in the processes of

the development of that material, ideology is in the form'. (1987:207,n.26)

### Kuleshov and the system of the suture

As previously noted, Kuleshov was the montage director whose film-making practice was closest to that of classical Hollywood cinema. Burch has indicated Kuleshov's motives in remaining so close to the model of classical cinema: to Kuleshov,

the institutional mode of representation, the genres and other coded systems founded upon it, offered ideal vehicles in the ideological struggle because of the privileged relationships which they already enjoyed with mass audiences. (Burch 1979:85)

Furthermore, Kuleshov had little interest in revealing these coded systems to the audience by using montage to disrupt and fragment the enunciation of his films. On the contrary, he always insisted on the need to smooth out the disruptive potential of montage in favour of a smooth, transparent discourse:

When we began using montage in our own films, we were attacked with reproaches: "You are out-and-out futurists, that's what you are. You show films comprised of tiny fragments. Their impression on the viewer is one of total chaos. Sequences follow each other with such speed that it becomes thoroughly impossible to understand what is actually happening." We then began to think what could be done to avoid these abrupt shifts when combining shots and sequences. (Kuleshov 1987:139)

Kuleshov was driven by his desire to create a filmic text which could be easily read; precisely the same motive lay behind the "linearization of the iconographic signifiers" which Burch proposes as the essential element of the classical cinema which ensures that "each frame would be immediately decipherable [...] *at first viewing*" (1979:82; original emphasis). Kuleshov asserted that

[a] single film shot should act as a sign, a letter of the alphabet, so that you can read it instantly, and so the viewer will immediately and fully grasp what it expresses. [...] If we want the viewer to apprehend the given shot as a sign, we must do a great deal of work to organize it properly, and for this there are limited means. (Kuleshov 1987:144)

The wish to create an easily legible filmic text overrode, in the case of Kuleshov, any tendency to use the montage method to disrupt or fragment the enunciation of the film. Kuleshov used the continuity devices of classical cinema, together with its system of suturing the spectator into the filmic text, in order to create a smooth and therefore transparent discourse. In this regard, Kuleshov used the example of a train shown first of all in the left-hand corner of the screen in one shot, then shown moving from right to left of the cinema screen in the next shot. Kuleshov claimed that

[i]f these two segments were joined together, the visual leap from one side of the screen to the other would be perceived as a sudden jerk which would irritate and disturb the viewer. He would not get the impression of a smooth transition. [...] If you remember this, you will avoid involuntary flickerings and jerks. If you don't, the end result will be a jumble of shots and sequences which only irritate the eye. (Kuleshov 1987:139)

Kuleshov here explicitly asserted the need to achieve “the impression of a smooth transition” from shot to shot, to render the cut as unobtrusive as possible and the enunciation – the creation of meaningful cinematographic statements out of raw film footage – as invisible as possible. The film-maker must above all never “irritate the eye” of the spectator.

For Kuleshov, obsessed as he was with criteria of comprehensibility, legibility and efficiency of filmic discourse, the purpose of film montage was no more or less than to create the desired meaning of a shot or sequence, independently of the actual nature of that shot itself, since montage allows the meaning of a shot to be created by the shots preceding or following it. For example, Kuleshov described how

[t]he montage was done in such a way that without being aware of it, we mentally imbued a serious face with a different expression in keeping with the spirit of that episode in the film. Montage had the greatest influence on the effect of the filmic material. (Kuleshov 1987:139)

The crucial phrase here is “without being aware of it”. Kuleshov wanted the way in which montage creates the meaning of the shot – that is, the enunciation of his films – to be concealed from the spectator in the interests of maximising the effectiveness of such signification on the spectator's emotions and on their ideology. This meant staying close to the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers



which was and is characteristic of classical cinema, and striving for the smooth, efficient, seamless narrative which the system of the suture could achieve.

### The “Pudovkin contradiction”

Pudovkin’s own theoretical writings make it very clear that he was concerned just as much as Kuleshov with the need for clarity and legibility of the filmic discourse, and the need to direct the viewer’s attention and to control their understanding of the film’s theme and ideological message. Pudovkin, in that respect, had the same fundamental aims as classical cinema, at least in terms of creating a linear, easily readable filmic text. He used many of classical cinema’s continuity devices and remained closer to its ideal of a seamless narrative and transparent enunciation than did either Eisenstein or Vertov. With the exception of a brief period of rather avant-garde radical experimentation (probably in emulation of Eisenstein’s successful example) which began with *The End of St Petersburg* (1927) and ended with the failure of *A Simple Case* (1932), Pudovkin used the montage method in a relatively conservative manner. As Burch has said, “Pudovkin was striving principally to extend the possibilities of the existing system [of classical cinema], while maintaining its essential principles” (1979:85). These “essential principles”, in Pudovkin’s case, consisted principally of what Burch has called “the linearization of all the iconographic signifiers” (1979:82).

This linearisation was implicitly described by Pudovkin as the creation of a linear discourse out of the potentially polyvalent signification of each shot. This arrangement of the iconographic signifiers in a linear ordering has the effect of creating a filmic discourse which has syntagmatic signification. The paradigmatic aspect of signification is usually largely absent from the cinematic text due to the fact that, as Metz has indicated, “Since these images are indefinite in number, only to a small degree do they assume their meanings in paradigmatic opposition to the other images that could have appeared at the same point along the filmic chain” (1982a:26).<sup>132</sup> Pudovkin pushed this tendency of cinema to an extreme. Almost all the signification in Pudovkin’s films was therefore achieved horizontally rather than vertically by a thoroughgoing linearisation of the iconographic signifiers, which he actually pushed further than was consistent with the suturing process of classical cinema. To achieve this linearisation, cinema had to become more like a literary text: a linear discourse in which each “brick” in the structure, each montage fragment, had to be as much like a word and as least like a

statement as possible, a discourse in which “the viewer’s attention can be drawn to each detail separately [...] just as one would describe them in sequence in a literary work” (Pudovkin 2006:46). Metz has emphasised that cinema is not a language system (*langue*), in part because each shot “yield[s] to the receiver a quantity of indefinite information, like statements but unlike words” (1982a:26); Pudovkin, against this fact, was trying to push cinema as close to being a language system as he could, through his obsessive linearisation of the iconographic signifiers. He was motivated by the desire to control and direct the spectator’s attention at every moment of the film; he once asserted that “[o]f course everybody knows that the essence of correct montage is the correct management of the viewer’s attention” (Pudovkin 2006:16). In this respect, Bazin’s condemnation of Eisenstein for exercising a despotic control over the spectator’s attention and over their reading of his films’ meaning would actually have been more appropriately directed against Pudovkin. Eisenstein certainly wished to “plough over the audience’s psyche”, but he did not linearise the iconographic signifiers of his films to anything like the extent to which Pudovkin did. Eisenstein’s shots and montage fragments are organised in his films in such a way that they have a significant degree of ambiguity of signification and are open to multiple possible readings, hence his greater use of associational montage and metaphoric tropes than Pudovkin.

While Kuleshov strove to achieve a smooth, seamless narrative through a suturing process, Pudovkin was more concerned with achieving maximal control over the attention of the spectator by linearising the iconographic signifiers. This attempt by Pudovkin to limit the number of possible ways of reading a film and to thereby control the signification process was sometimes in contradiction to the establishment of a self-consistent diegetic spatial continuum, which tended to undermine the suturing process. However, Pudovkin shared Kuleshov’s view of the montage method as essentially constructive and he therefore did not strive for the kind of disruptive and dislocating montage effects which Eisenstein was able to achieve with his more dialectical and conflictual approach to the nature of film montage.

Where Pudovkin’s work represents an advance on that of Griffith is that the cutting and fragmentation of his films (a necessary precondition for the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers) does more than merely isolate the series of signifiers and present them to the spectator in a certain order. In Pudovkin’s

films, it also controls the production of meaning of the filmic discourse by modifying the dynamics and tempo of the succession of montage fragments; what Eisenstein referred to as “rhythmic montage”. The meaning of the montage fragments, their emotional and rhetorical effect on the spectator, is created by the precise way in which they are juxtaposed with adjacent fragments. The sequence near the beginning of *The Mother* in which the father tries to remove the household clock from the wall to pawn it for vodka is a good example of this effect, as Burch has pointed out (1979:86).

Pudovkin considered the watching of a film to require considerable conscious effort of concentration on the part of the spectator, in contrast to the apparent effortlessness of watching a classical film:<sup>133</sup>

It should always be borne in mind that a film, by the very nature of its construction (the rapid succession of fragments), requires of the viewer an exceptional concentration of attention. [...] [T]here is neither space nor time for reflection, doubt or criticism, which is why the slightest lapse in clarity or structural coherence is perceived as an unpleasant muddle [*sumbur*] or simply as an ineffective blank. (2006:35)

Pudovkin ascribed the necessity for the spectator’s concentration of attention to rapid cutting. However, this cannot be the correct explanation, since the apparently seamless narratives of classical cinema are relatively easy for the audience to read, yet such films have almost as many cuts as a montage film and likewise consist of “the rapid succession of fragments”. The true reason is undoubtedly the way in which the classical film sutures the spectator into the filmic text, constructing a seamless narrative and a “reality effect” which makes the watching of a classical film seem to be almost like the passive contemplation of reality itself. Pudovkin’s montage films require an “exceptional concentration of attention” because he has little interest in suturing the spectator into the filmic text; his neglect of the construction of a self-consistent diegetic space is symptomatic of this fact. The absence of a seamless narrative required Pudovkin to seize hold of the spectator’s attention and guide it through the linear succession of signifiers, a necessity which led Pudovkin to pursue the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers as far as he possibly could, even to the detriment of other aspects of classical cinema such as the construction of a self-consistent diegetic space-time. Because the system of the suture is based on the Lacanian account of the mirror stage of development during which the infant first establishes a clear sense

of space and time, the cinematic suturing process is therefore closely connected with the construction of a self-consistent diegetic space and time. To subvert or to refuse to construct such a self-consistent diegetic space and time is to challenge the reality effect created by the system of the suture, and thereby to undermine the suturing process itself. Pudovkin's films do not recapitulate the mirror stage in order to suture the Imaginary and Symbolic orders in the spectator's psyche, and the unified and self-consistent spatial continuum (which the mirror stage is instrumental in enabling the infant to mentally construct for the first time) is therefore not an essential element in them and he is relatively unconcerned with maintaining it, as Burch has demonstrated (1979).

Pudovkin, who had directly collaborated with Kuleshov in the early 1920s, even assisting him with the Mozzhukhin experiment which demonstrated the Kuleshov Effect, initially adopted a similar approach towards the use of the montage method as Kuleshov. However, he increasingly diverged from Kuleshov's seamless use of montage during the 1920s, largely due to the example Eisenstein was setting with his much more radical and extremely successful montage films. This culminated in 1927 with the release of *The End of St Petersburg*, Pudovkin's most aesthetically radical film. Kepley has emphasised Pudovkin's debt to Eisenstein in this regard:

Even as a work-in-progress, Eisenstein's *October* influenced Pudovkin's evolving conception of *The End of St Petersburg* [...]. Pudovkin especially admired those sequences in *October* in which the editing defied conventional time and space. (2003:37)

Pudovkin was influenced by Eisenstein precisely in his refusal to construct a self-consistent diegetic space and time; this was essentially a refusal to suture the spectator into the filmic text.

Pudovkin's films, in this respect, represent a return to an earlier stage in the development of cinema when the increased number of cuts required by the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers led to a disruption of the diegetic spatial continuum and thereby risked a loss of the imaginary unity of the spectator with the image. The result is that, in Dayan's words,

the cinematic succession of images threatens to interrupt or even to expose and to deconstruct the representation system [...]. The viewer's identification with the subjective function proposed by the painting or photograph is broken again and again during the viewing of a film. (1974:28)

In fact, Soviet montage cinema is perhaps the most extreme example of this – some shots in Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera* are only a few frames long, and deliberately push the limits of human perception. Burch calls this “the unfortunate ‘dissociative’ effect which the first interpolated close-ups had upon the unity of films” and which was “the price that had to be paid for an increase in ‘expressiveness,’ in other words, a greater control over the production of meaning” (Burch 1979:87-88). This “dissociative effect” is indeed the effect which Pudovkin’s “analytic penchant” and his “weaken[ing] of the verisimilitude of the diegetic spatial continuum” (1979:87) has upon the spectator of his films, as Burch has noted.

In classical cinema, the system of the suture is used to avoid the breakdown of the imaginary unity of the spectator with the image by suturing the gap between the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders in the spectator’s psyche; this permits the “reality effect” to exist even with analytical editing and rapid cutting. Pudovkin, by contrast, fragmented the diegetic spatial continuum by analytical editing, but did not use the system of the suture to fully stitch the gap between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in the spectator’s psyche. Pudovkin’s famous use of slow-motion<sup>134</sup> at moments of emotional or rhetorical intensity (for example, when the firing squad turns in unison in *Storm Over Asia* (1928)) is characteristic of how far he was prepared to take the linearisation of the filmic discourse in pursuit of his aim of controlling the viewer’s attention. For Pudovkin, the reality effect could be suspended in the interests of controlling the signification process. As Pudovkin himself claimed, “Slow motion in montage is not a distortion of an actual process. It is a portrayal that is both more profound and more precise, deliberately guiding the attention of the audience” (Pudovkin 2006:190). As Burch puts it,

Pudovkin’s analytical penchant, his concern to make each picture into a “brick” as elementary as possible in a chain of signification which he can control as closely as possible, does indeed lead him *to weaken the verisimilitude of the diegetic spatial continuum*. (1979:87; original emphasis)

Burch seems to regard this as being a result of Pudovkin’s failure to understand the contradiction between his pushing of the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers as far as possible in the interests of a maximal control over the production of meaning, and the supposed requirement to maintain the “reality effect” of classical cinema:

Pudovkin fails to see that the enunciation characteristic of the system [of classical cinema] is not simply a succession of signs, as decomposed as possible, but that it is founded on a dialectic between such “stripped-down” images and a more complex spatiality offering complementary guarantees. (Burch 1979:88)

Burch even calls this “the Pudovkin contradiction” (1979:88). In effect, though he does not mention the system of the suture, Burch is accusing Pudovkin of failing to understand the suturing process of classical cinema. However, it is not the case that Pudovkin intended to adopt the methods of classical cinema *tout court*. Like all of the Soviet montage directors in their various ways, he was adopting some of the methods and devices of classical cinema, but not others. The linearisation of the iconographic signifiers – “stripping-down” the images and arranging them as a linear succession of signs – was one of the methods which Pudovkin, following Kuleshov’s example, adopted from classical cinema. However, unlike Kuleshov, he did not wish only to create an easily read filmic discourse by suturing the spectator into the filmic text. It is not that Pudovkin was unaware of classical cinema’s creation of a self-consistent diegetic space-time, nor that he lacked the skills as a director to create such a diegetic space-time; rather, he had no wish to render the enunciation of his montage films invisible. The system of the suture conceals the enunciation of a film, so that the fiction of the film seems to speak itself, to use Dayan’s phrase, rather than being spoken. Pudovkin – along with Eisenstein and Vertov too – wished to foreground the rhetoric of his films and to make the spectator conscious of its ideological effect. This implied that the enunciation of his films had to be rendered visible, which further implied that the spectator of his films could not be fully “stitched in” to the filmic text. The weakening of the suturing process in Pudovkin’s films has the effect of weakening the reality effect created by that process, as Burch notes, but this was in fact a *deliberate* weakening of the illusionism characteristic of classical cinema:

in many sequences of his silent films diegetic space is reduced to such an abstraction that important effects such as the illusion of the presence of characters *to each other* are considerably weakened. (1979:88; original emphasis)

Pudovkin was exerting control over the spectator every bit as despotic as that of the system of the suture, but he was *not concealing* that despotic control. He had no wish to naturalise the ideology embedded in his films, and therefore had

no real interest in sustaining the “reality effect” produced by the system of the suture.

Burch’s claim that Pudovkin “fails to see” the incompatibility between the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers in “stripped-down” images and the construction of a self-consistent diegetic space-time (1979:88) implies that Burch assumes that Pudovkin was essentially trying merely to improve on the model of classical cinema in some evolutionary sense, adopting classical cinema *tout court* as his starting-point. The montage film-makers adopted many of the continuity devices of classical cinema, but (with the possible exception of Kuleshov) they did not adopt its ethos of illusionism, a seamless narrative or the reality effect, all of which are the result of classical cinema’s use of the system of the suture. In fact, if the montage film-makers had actually striven to create the sort of invisible enunciation and seamless narrative characteristic of classical cinema, then such aesthetic advances as Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” or his “intellectual montage”, or Vertov’s radical montage experiments in *The Man with a Movie Camera*, would hardly have been possible. As Bordwell has emphasised, “Soviet montage cinema constituted a challenge to classical narrative and decoupage on almost every front” (1985:73). Burch seems to acknowledge this when he describes the montage film-makers’ “derogations from the seamlessness of the representational fabric” and states that “this type of construction in one way or another was a major concern of nearly all the important Soviet directors” (Burch 1979:89-90), which implies that the “Pudovkin contradiction” was in fact a deliberate one. Given the assumption that Pudovkin was aware of what he was doing, and given the fact that he was not trying to fully suture the spectator into his filmic texts, it follows that there is actually no contradiction between Pudovkin’s adoption of the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers and his lack of concern with maintaining the illusionism of a self-consistent diegetic space or time. Indeed, Pudovkin saw great advantages in *not* constructing a self-consistent diegetic spatial or temporal continuum, as he noted when describing the making of *The End of St Petersburg*:

In the normal plot film the montage is not so complicated. Everything is subordinated to literary sequence. People meet, they converse, they part. All the senses develop within the confines of the logic of real time and space. [. . .] It is much more complicated when there is essentially no ‘scene’ at all. There is only the cinematic development of a theme, for instance, a factory

or the stock-exchange, or the trenches at night. Here everything depends on rhythm. [...] From the outset all of us working on the film set ourselves the task of constructing almost everything on non-diegetic [*vnesiuzhetnyi*] raw material. (Pudovkin 2006:132)

What Pudovkin means by “literary sequence” here is not the linearisation of the iconographic signifiers, “just as one would describe them in sequence in a literary work” (2006:46), but rather a particular way of constructing a narrative out of the movements and actions of characters in a self-consistent diegetic spatial continuum in which “[a]ll the senses develop within the confines of the logic of real time and space”. He specifically denies that this is his method of constructing a film, hence his use of the phrase “non-diegetic raw material” in describing his actual method, a method which is clearly not consistent with the use of classical cinema’s system of the suture.

### The function of the close-up in montage cinema

One would expect that such an intense linearisation of a film’s meaning and the restriction of its possible ways of being read would tend to valorise the close-up above the establishing long shot, and this indeed is precisely what we find in Pudovkin’s films and in his theoretical writings. In classical cinema, the close-ups are in principle excerpted from the diegesis and then inserted into the filmic discourse. Pudovkin, by contrast, regards the close-ups not as excerpts from some (abstract) pre-existing diegetic scene, but as elementary “bricks” out of which the film’s discourse (but not necessarily a self-consistent diegetic space-time) is to be constructed: “All the details relating to the scenes [...] should not be ‘inserted’ into the scene, rather the scene must be constructed from them” (2006:47). To Pudovkin, montage was essentially constructive and its purpose “is to show graphically the development of the scene, directing the viewer’s attention first to one, then to another individual element” (2006:58).

Eisenstein’s attitude towards the close-up was similar to Pudovkin’s in the sense that he did not regard it as an excerpt from a pre-existing diegetic scene, but differed from Pudovkin’s in the sense that he did not use the close-ups as “bricks” out of which to construct his montage films. Rather, to Eisenstein the close-up was a magnification rather than a drawing near, a means of emphasising a particular meaning or underlining a particular rhetorical point. In Aumont’s words,



the close shot has almost nothing to do with a cinema of scenic space: as Amengual puts it, “the close-up in Eisenstein is not a *closer* shot, it is a *magnified* shot,” (in “Eisenstein and Hieroglyphs”). For Eisenstein, the transition to the close-up is not the adoption of a different point of view on the object from within the same scenic perspective: it is an actual “magnification,” or affirmation of a meaning and its articulation (probably not without some figurative function besides). (1987:188)

This use of the close-up was actually a throw-back to an earlier stage of cinema’s development. As Burch has noted, “For Méliès, close-ups were always “giant faces”: the screen, he felt, was the only plane a film could contain” (1979:81,n.4). Classical cinema employed the close-up as an integral element in the construction, through analytical editing, of a diegetic scene with a self-consistent spatial continuum. Eisenstein explicitly repudiated such a function for the close-up in his montage films, and by implication in the montage films of Pudovkin and Vertov too, when he wrote that

[w]e say: an object or face is photographed in “large scale,” i.e., *large*.

The American says: *near*, or “close-up.”

[...]

Among Americans the term is attached to *viewpoint*.

Among us – to *the value of what is seen*.

[...] the principal function of the close-up in our cinema is – not only and not so much to *show* or to *present*, as to *signify*, to *give meaning*, to *designate*. (Eisenstein 1977:237-38; original emphasis)

The close-up could also be used in montage cinema to emphasise the indexicality (in the Peircean sense) of the image itself, due to the close-up’s detachment from a self-consistent diegetic spatial continuum:

the effect of the close-up [in *The Old and the New*] is fully felt: abstracted from any context, the shots serve exactly as abstractions – there is, for example, no object in the frame to give a sense of scale, and thus, from the point of view of the figuration, the miniature cascades of milk are strictly equivalent to gigantic waterfalls. (Aumont 1987:101)

This was true not merely for Eisenstein but for Vertov too: the spinning reel of metal wire in *The Man with a Movie Camera* is only one example. Such non-objective “abstract moments”, as Malevich called them (Tupitsyn 2002a:66), were

also a significant means by which the montage film-makers could subvert the suturing process, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter.

### “Cubist art principles on film”

This refusal to join close-ups or other montage fragments together into a seamless construction is summed up by Eisenstein’s advice to “[a]lways [...] choose pieces of shots that do not fit” (Mayer 1972:13). A famous example of such a practice occurs in *Potemkin*, in the sequence in which an officer’s plate is angrily smashed by the sailor who is washing it. Eisenstein shows the dish being smashed twice in quick succession, once after the sailor raises it above his left shoulder and again after he raises it above his right shoulder (Figs. 6.1 and 6.2).

David Mayer identifies this technique with what he calls “cubist art principles



Figure 6.1: Still from Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*: the sailor smashes the dish, first by throwing it down from over his left shoulder. . .

on film” (1972:13). Cubist painting often presents an object as seen from several different perspectives simultaneously. In the case of this sequence from *Potemkin*, however, the same event is not merely seen from multiple perspectives; rather,



Figure 6.2: Still from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*: ...and then from over his right shoulder.

the event which Eisenstein presents in the film sequence is impossible within a self-consistent diegetic space and time. The dish cannot have been simultaneously raised above both the sailor's left and right shoulders, and it cannot have been smashed twice. Eisenstein is here deliberately creating precisely the kind of "sudden jerk" and "abrupt shift" which Kuleshov took such pains to avoid. Rather than striving to create the "impression of a smooth transition", Eisenstein was deliberately "irritat[ing] the eye" of the spectator in order to wind up the tension of the sequence and to achieve rhetorical effect by disrupting and thereby foregrounding the enunciation of the filmic text. This is not really a cinematic parallel to cubism, as Mayer claims, but can be better understood as a deliberate violation of the system of the suture, a refusal to stitch the spectator into a self-consistent diegetic space and time. The enunciation of the film becomes visible, the ideology embedded in that enunciation is denaturalised and made explicit, and the rhetorical and emotional effect of the sequence is enhanced.

There is a similar example in Vertov's film *The Man with a Movie Camera*, about 20 minutes into the film, when a woman opens the same window shutters

twice in quick succession. She is seen first seen from one angle, then from another; the same event is seen repeatedly from two different perspectives, the film flicking back and forth between the two spatial perspectives and back and forth in time (Figs. 6.3 and 6.4). The “impossibility” in this case is not in the diegetic space-



Figure 6.3: Still from Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*: a woman opens the same shutters from one perspective. . .

time itself, but in the spectator's positioning within that diegetic space-time. Just as in the sequence from *Potemkin*, the effect is to rupture the spectator's suturing into the filmic text, to foreground the film's enunciation and prevent it from becoming invisible to the spectator.

Moreover, whereas in the system of the suture the constitution of the meaning of the shot depends upon the spectator being successfully sutured into the filmic text, the constitution of the meaning of a montage fragment in Eisenstein's montage films depends upon the preservation of the *discontinuity* between the montage fragments. In Aumont's words, "the meaning of the proposition emerges only if the spatial disjunction of the two shots is clearly and distinctly preserved" (1987:158). Aumont calls this the "absolute liberation of the action from its determination by time and space". Without the disjunction between the shots,



Figure 6.4: Still from Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*: ...and again from another perspective.

without the detachment of the montage fragments from their place in the diegetic spatial and temporal continuum, the metaphoric meaning could neither be constituted nor communicated to the spectator. The montage fragment showing the slaughter of a bull, which is juxtaposed against the diegetic scene of the striking workers being massacred by Tsarist troops in *Strike*, is perhaps the most obvious example of this – not being part of the diegetic scene of the film, the slaughter of the bull must be interpreted metaphorically and thereby acquires tremendous rhetorical power.

### Eisenstein's concept of “organicism”

However, Eisenstein specifically warned against the practice of a montage based on attributing an independent meaning to each fragment:

the danger of this form of montage would be that of falling, through laziness, into the practice of a montage based on a “meaning” attributed to each

fragment. That, Eisenstein says, would lead back to the most primitive phases of the development of the art. (Aumont 1987:204,n.2)

Eisenstein's tendency to "[a]llways [...] choose pieces of shot that do not fit" (Mayer 1972:13) was balanced by a tendency throughout his career to place an increasing emphasis on the Hegelian totality of the filmic text, as Aumont has pointed out:

it could almost be said that the fragment does not exist outside of this system of its relations to the other fragments (to the whole of the text). The idea that it could be autonomized and extracted as a unit of meaning is completely contrary to that constant preoccupation with the systematic [...] and whose culmination will be seen [...] with the notion of organicism. (1987:36)

Far from being in direct contradiction to his earlier emphasis on fragmentation and disjunction, Eisenstein's increasing emphasis on the organic totality of the art work as the ultimate source of the meaning of the individual elements of the work was actually a logical development of his earlier positions. I am therefore denying the validity, at least in the form originally proposed by Bordwell (1975), of Eisenstein's supposed "epistemological shift" in the late 1920s. Bordwell had argued that while Eisenstein's early work was based on a "fusion of Pavlovian physiology and dialectical materialism" (1975:39), his later work had a significantly different aesthetic and theoretical basis: an "empiricist epistemology and organic aesthetic" (1975:43). His conclusion was that "[w]e are left, then, with not one but two Eisensteins. The earlier theorist grounds his system in physiology and dialectical materialism, the later in psychology and empiricism" (1975:44) and that this is reflected in his actual film-making practice, in "the marked stylistic and formal differences between his silent and sound films, between the dialectical, epic 'intellectual' cinema and the synesthetic 'operas' of court intrigue" (1975:44). Aumont, among others, has criticised this "received" idea that there is not one Eisenstein but two and that the later Eisenstein contradicts and renounces the earlier one (1987:151-56). Even Bordwell himself has retreated from the position put forward in his *Screen* article.<sup>135</sup>

Montage fragments, as Kuleshov made clear with his famous Mozhukhin experiment, have no meaning in themselves; instead, they acquire meaning by juxtaposition with other montage fragments. The logical conclusion of this idea is that each montage fragment only has meaning in relation to the totality (not

merely the sum but the “product” of all the montage fragments, as Eisenstein put it) of the filmic text itself. Indeed, even according to the system of the suture itself, the meaning of a given shot is only established retrospectively, from its juxtaposition relative to subsequent shots.

This increasingly important concept of “organicism” in Eisenstein’s writings and in his films had the important effect that for Eisenstein the montage fragments, such as close-ups, could be separated from their *diegetic* context but could never be completely detached from their context within the filmic text itself without losing their meaning altogether. An example of such a montage fragment which is detached from the diegetic space-time of the film but is not detached from the filmic text itself is of course the famous sequence in *Strike* in which a bull is slaughtered while, in the film’s diegetic scene, the striking workers are being massacred by Tsarist troops. The montage fragment does not fit into the diegetic scene, but its presence at this point in the filmic text works in juxtaposition with the surrounding montage fragments to generate metaphoric meaning.

Aumont has even suggested that Eisenstein’s concept of “organicism” operated in the same sort of way as the system of the suture:

organicism appears to be something that miraculously sews up the rents in the fabric of the work created by fragmentation, suturing together the film fragments, those bits and pieces “ripped from the highly colored body of nature” – and it is therefore what protects against the breaking up of that “body,” what insures its unity. (1987:65)

This would imply that Eisenstein did not so much subvert or reject the system of the suture as substitute his own concept of “organicism” in its place, an organicism which would constitute the meaning of each individual montage fragment within the totality of the film itself. In my view, however, this would be to misinterpret what Eisenstein understood by the concept of “organicism”. In the essay on which he was working on the day of his death, Eisenstein wrote about what he considered to be the necessary balance between the disruption of the “reality effect”, the refusal to entirely suture the viewer into the film, and the organic totality of the film which gives context to and constitutes the meaning of the individual montage fragments:

There is a widespread, but, to my mind, erroneous, opinion about utilizing the expressive medium of the cinema, which holds that a film is good when one does not hear the music, when one does not notice the labor of the

cinematographer, when the mastery of the director goes unacknowledged. [...] What this point of view conventionalizes is the inability to control all the expressive means that contribute to the organically unified filmic oeuvre. (Qtd. in Aumont 1987:221,n.33)

This statement encapsulates Eisenstein's rejection of the transparency of the enunciation of the filmic text, a position he maintained even to the end of his career. This position implied the rejection of the system of the suture, since the aim of that system is precisely the invisibility of the enunciation of the filmic text and the creation of a smooth narrative continuity without aporia or disjunctions to jolt the spectator. There is therefore a fundamental difference between the system of the suture and Eisenstein's concept of the "organicism" of a work of art. For Eisenstein, "organicism" need not automatically exclude the existence of conflict or disjunction between the individual elements of the organic totality, nor did it require or imply the invisibility of the enunciation of the filmic text.

### Constructivist camera angles and ruptured screens

The identification of the spectator with the camera which is characteristic of the system of the suture, while it is usually an unconscious part of the suturing process, can be made visible by unusual framings or camera angles. Indeed, this is what Vertov frequently does in his films, particularly *The Man with a Movie Camera*. As Metz has pointed out, "The ordinary framings are finally felt to be non-framings: I espouse the film-maker's look (without which no cinema would be possible), but my consciousness is not too aware of it" (1982b:55). It is precisely this suturing process, this lack of consciousness of the tricks by which the commercial cinema poisons (as Vertov saw it) the mind of the spectator, which Vertov sought to undermine. One of the means by which he attempted to do this was the use of unusual camera angles or framings of the image, in particular by shooting tall buildings or structures from low angles (see Fig. 6.5 for an example of this). The use of low camera angles in urban scenes was also characteristic of the photographic work of Alexander Rodchenko, a Constructivist artist who often collaborated with Vertov and designed many of the posters for his films.

The effect of such camera angles has been described by Metz, who suggested that "precisely because it is uncommon, the uncommon angle makes us more aware of what we had merely forgotten to some extent in its absence: an identification with the camera (with 'the author's viewpoint')" (1982b:55). Metz also





Figure 6.5: Still from Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*: an example of Vertov's use of Constructivist camera angles and framings.

makes the interesting point that such unusual camera angles can function as a means of controlling the spectator's attention, directing their gaze in a manner diametrically opposed to the deep-focus long-take cinematography advocated by Bazin:

The uncommon angle reawakens me and (like the cure) teaches me what I already knew. And then, it obliges my look to stop wandering freely over the screen for the moment and to scan it along more precise lines of force which are imposed on me. Thus for a moment I become directly aware of the emplacement of my own presence-absence in the film simply because it has changed. (1982b:55)

An example of the same effect from Eisenstein's films is the battleship steaming towards the viewer at the end of *Potemkin*, seen from a low angle, making the viewer conscious of his or her position as a spectator by towering over them, splitting the screen open and threatening to catastrophically bridge the distance between the voyeuristic spectator and the diegetic scene (Fig. 6.6). One thinks



Figure 6.6: Still from Eisenstein's *Potemkin*: the battleship rupturing the cinema screen.

also of the legendary story of the first audience of the Lumière brothers' short film *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, who fled from the building when the train seemed about to burst out of the screen and crush them. Eisenstein seems to atavistically evoke an earlier stage in the development of cinema, a stage before the system of the suture had been developed, in order to produce a traumatic rupture of the suturing process to symbolise the revolution breaking through the historical process just as the battleship *Potemkin* symbolically breaks through the cinema screen to end the film.

### 6.3 The system of the suture and “non-objective cinema”

The subversion of the suturing process at the level of the enunciation is a significant aspect of montage cinema's nature as political rhetoric. The refusal to entirely suture the spectator into the filmic text, like the analyst's refusal to su-

ture (Heath 1981:85), is what enabled the montage film-makers to de-naturalise the ideology embodied in the enunciation of their films and enabled their films to function as agitation propaganda rather than integration propaganda, to use Ellul’s terminology (1973:75). Its use of the suturing process is what enables Hollywood cinema to function so well as integration propaganda (Bernays 2005:166). In fact, socialist realism, which was to displace all other methods of artistic creation in the Soviet Union from the mid-1930s onwards, also functioned as such an integration propaganda. Soviet cinema in general gradually shifted from being an agitation propaganda during the revolutionary period of the 1920s to being an integration propaganda along the same lines as Hollywood cinema by the 1930s (though far more explicit in its functioning as propaganda). That shift in the function of Soviet cinema from agitation to integration was accompanied by a corresponding shift away from the subversion of the suturing process undertaken by montage cinema towards a return to the system of the suture and its associated illusionistic system of representation and its naturalisation of ideology.

However, attempting to (in Lacanian terms) open the gap between the Imaginary and Symbolic orders in the spectator’s psyche by refusing to construct a self-consistent diegetic space and time was merely one method of subverting the suturing process. The fundamental root of the naturalisation of ideology in the spectator’s mind is the “reality effect” produced by the system of the suture; that is, the illusionistic system of representation which presents ideology as being part of nature, part of reality itself, rather than a social and political construct. In Dayan’s words,

the image of an object must be understood to be the pretext that the painter uses to illustrate the system through which he translates ideology into perceptual schemes. The object represented is a “pretext” for the painting as a “text” to be produced. The object hides the painting’s textuality by preventing the viewer from focusing on it. However, the text of the painting is totally offered to view. It is, as it were, hidden *outside* the object. It is here but we do not see it. We see through it to the imaginary object. Ideology is hidden in our very eyes. (1974:26)

What Dayan wrote concerning classical painting applies with equal force to classical cinema. The illusionistic representation of objects – the reality effect of the suturing process – is at the root of the naturalisation of ideology which is characteristic of integration propaganda. Dayan raises the essential question:

Can there be a cinematography not based upon the system of representation? This is an interesting and important question which cannot be explored here. It would seem that there has not been such a cinematography. (1974:28)

In fact, such a cinematography was actually proposed in the 1920s by one of the artists most responsible for ending the hegemony of the illusionistic representation of objects in easel painting, Kazimir Malevich. He claimed that Soviet montage cinema itself was, or at least showed the potential to become, the cinematography “not based upon the system of representation” for which Dayan was later to call.

## Chapter 7

# Soviet Film Montage and “Non-objective Cinema”

Dayan has pointed out that both classical painting and classical cinema are organised by “the system of representation”, which he suggested functions as a means of concealing the operations of ideology behind the illusionistic representation of objects presented for a subject to gaze upon, using the system of the suture to create the “reality effect” (1974:26). The implication of this position is that by rejecting the illusionistic representation of objects in favour of treating images in the same sort of way that abstract painting treats images, montage cinema could in principle subvert the system of the suture and thereby make the spectator conscious of the operations of ideology both in montage films and in reality itself. Dayan asked whether there can be such a cinematography not based on the system of representation (1974:28). While the potential of the Soviet montage cinema of the 1920s to be such a non-representational cinema never fully materialised, that potential was recognised at the time by one of the leading figures of avant-garde art, Kazimir Malevich. Just as Dayan has emphasised the connection between the codes of classical painting and those of the single frame or the static shot of classical cinema, so Malevich described some of the frames or shots of montage cinema as “abstract moments” sharing much in common with non-objective Suprematist painting.

This chapter will therefore examine Malevich’s concept of “non-objective cinema” and investigate to what extent montage cinema conforms to Malevich’s concept and what implications this has for the political and ideological functioning of montage cinema.

## 7.1 Malevich on cinema and politics

Malevich's interest in cinema may seem rather surprising at first glance. After all, Malevich was a polemical advocate for the cause of abstract, "non-objective" art and had founded Suprematism for that purpose, whereas cinema has as its technical basis the mechanical recording of images of the physical world. Cinema as an artistic medium would therefore seem to be inevitably based on mimesis rather than abstraction. Nonetheless, Malevich seems to have believed that for Suprematism to make progress as an artistic movement it had to extend its activities in the direction of a fusion of space and time through movement, an extension for which cinema was obviously ideally suited as an artistic medium.<sup>136</sup> Malevich may also have been attracted to cinema as an artistic medium partly by the nature of the cinema screen itself. A bare white space usually formed the ground of Suprematist paintings and, as Shatskikh says, "The similarity between the white cinema screen and the white ground of a Suprematist picture ('a sheet of white canvas') is clear – both possess the same qualities, both are exponents of spatial relativity, and both are simultaneously flat and fathomless, seen as either receding away from or coming towards the viewer" (1993:477). Margarita Tupitsyn has also pointed out that at his *0,10* exhibition in 1915, Malevich's famous abstract painting *Black Square* (Fig. 7.1) "looked like a screen with a flat 'black image,' as if it were a projection. Furthermore, Malevich's placing of other paintings in vertical rather than horizontal alignment, could trigger in the mind of the viewer an association with a filmstrip hanging loosely above an editing table" (2002a:15).

Alexandra Shatskikh has described Malevich's ambitions for both a new kind of Suprematism and a new kind of cinema:

The logical conclusion of Suprematism would therefore have been to capture movement itself, fusing time and space into an indissoluble whole [...] a 'film culture' would have allowed him to realise this new concept of time and space. He saw the emergence of a new type of spiritual artist, a 'film-painter of dynamic pictures', as the inevitable result of the introduction of non-objectivity into cinematographic language. (1993:478)

Malevich was to travel to Germany in 1927 in pursuit of this ambition, and hoped to collaborate with Hans Richter in the creation of a non-objective Suprematist cinema. For various reasons, this ambition failed to materialise, however, and

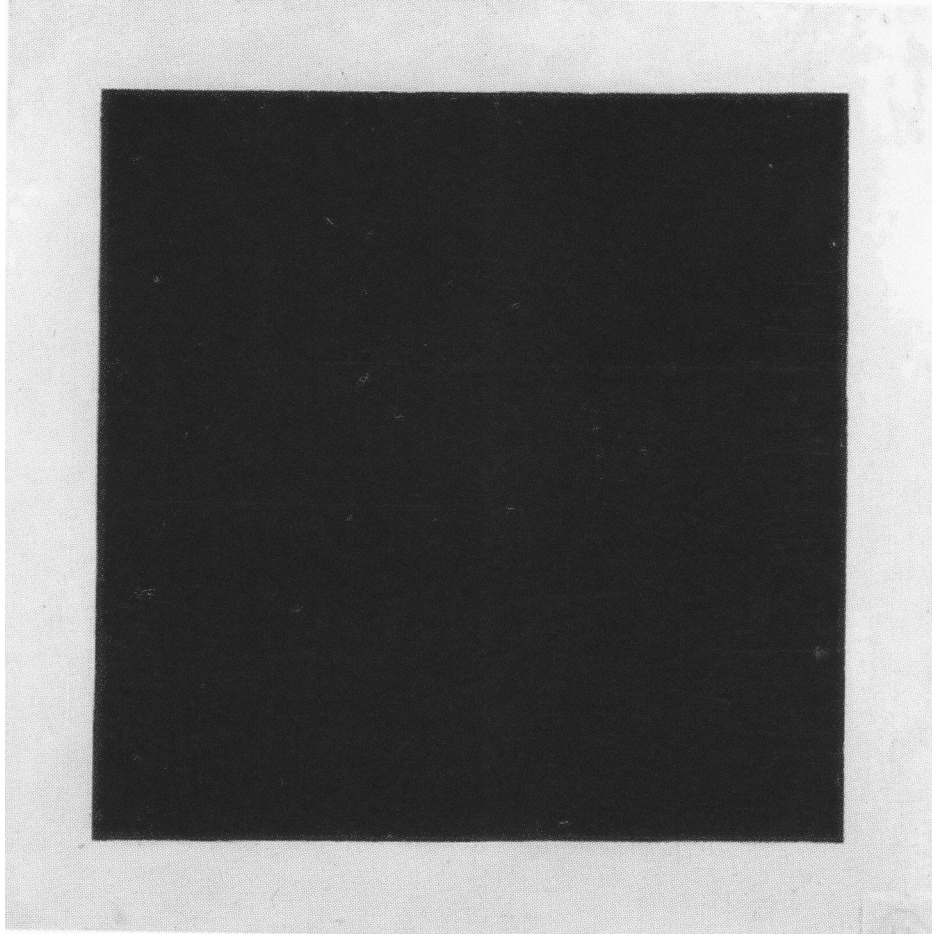


Figure 7.1: Malevich, *Black Square* (1920s), oil on canvas. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Malevich soon returned to the Soviet Union. His vision of personally creating a Suprematist cinema remained unfulfilled by the time of his death in 1935.

The essential basis of this hypothetical Suprematist cinema has been summarised by Margarita Tupitsyn when she wrote that “Malevich eventually realized that the meeting of abstract and real could only be achieved in film” (2002a:30). Malevich himself described the potential he saw in cinema to enable the Suprematist movement itself to develop further as being due to the fact that “technology found the way of painting animated images on the screen’s canvas” (Malevich 1968b:233). Before that technological breakthrough,

the artist was only able to fix on the static canvas *one* impression of this movement *in one still*. The artist remained in this hopeless, doomed position until [...] technology invented cinematography and achieved the re-

production not of an *impression* but of an actual *movement* [...]. From this moment art fell into two basic division: some artists became objectivists (concretists), easel painters [...]; others became non-objectivists (abstractionists) who [...] rejected the portrait [...]. (Malevich 1968b:233; original emphasis)

It is significant that Malevich credited cinema rather than photography with the creation of non-objective abstract art; this is undoubtedly due to the fact that Malevich regarded the concept of dynamism as an essential aspect of what he meant by “non-objective art”. It therefore seemed natural to him to wish to extend the Suprematist movement into cinema.

Before departing for Germany, Malevich wrote several articles in which he expressed hopes that the Soviet montage film-makers, particularly Eisenstein and Vertov, might themselves be on the road towards the kind of cinema he hoped to create himself: non-objective cinema. Malevich seems to have regarded Eisenstein and Vertov as the only Soviet film-makers who showed at least the potential to become such “film-painter[s] of dynamic pictures”, or Suprematist film-makers. Malevich ignored the work even of other montage directors such as Kuleshov or Pudovkin, since he did not regard them as having rejected the representational aspect of classical cinema in a sufficiently radical way. The potential he saw in Eisenstein and Vertov had to do with the way those film-makers represented objects in their films, which he saw as the first steps towards the final dethronement of the tyranny (as he saw it) of objective mimesis in cinema. In his own words,

Eisenstein and Vertov are really first-class artists with leftist tendencies,<sup>137</sup> for the first inclines to contrast, the second to the “display of things”, but there still remains a large section of the path to Cézannism, Cubism, Futurism and Non-objective Suprematism for them to cover, and the further course of the development of their artistic culture can only be predetermined from the understanding of the principle of this school. (Qtd. in Shatskikh 1993:474,n.19)

It is clear from these words that Malevich was trying to fit montage cinema into the tradition of easel painting and that he saw montage cinema as being on an inevitable trajectory towards “non-objective Suprematism”. Indeed, Eisenstein certainly agreed with Malevich that montage cinema was part of the tradition of painting. Eisenstein expressed disapproval of



those who do not regard the pictorial medium of cinema – its dynamic use of light and montage to make pictures – as a contemporary form of painting. There actually are such eccentrics who obstinately refuse to understand this and are totally unable to accept cinema – that miracle of pictorial potential – as part of the mainstream of the development and history of painting. This seems to me profoundly unjust: the difference of ‘technology’ is irrelevant. (Eisenstein 1991:83)

However, Eisenstein decisively rejected Malevich’s call for montage cinema to follow the path towards non-objective Suprematism. While he was happy to agree with Malevich in placing montage cinema in the tradition of painting, Eisenstein regarded Malevich himself as an easel painter whose aesthetic ideas were irremediably rooted in the institutional framework of easel painting and pictorialism, and condemned what he saw as Malevich’s application of that pictorialism to cinema:

To pass judgement on the pictorialism of a *shot* in cinema is naive. It is for people with a reasonable knowledge of painting but absolutely no qualifications in cinema. This kind of judgement could include, for example, Kazimir Malevich’s statements on cinema. Not even a film novice would now analyse a film shot as if it were an easel painting. (Eisenstein 1988:191; original emphasis)

It should be said, however, that Eisenstein’s disdain for Malevich’s “pictorialism” was perhaps a little disingenuous. Kuleshov was to criticise Eisenstein for what he perceived to be precisely this tendency towards pictorialism in his own films:

Eisenstein is more a director of the single shot, always pleasing to the eye and expressive, than of montage and man in movement. His shots are always more effective than the rest; in the main, it is they that guarantee the success of his works. It is enough simply to recall the hosing episode in *Strike*, the infinite savouring of these photogenic pieces of film, to become totally convinced of the director’s excellent eye, of his particular fondness for the plastically expressive shot. (Kuleshov 1987:69)

While a large part of Kuleshov’s criticism of Eisenstein’s practice could be ascribed to his adherence to his own somewhat different (and rather more primitive) version of film montage, nonetheless there is some truth to his criticism. Some shots of the hosing episode in *Strike* are indeed almost like abstract compositions, or “abstract moments” as Malevich called them (Tupitsyn 2002a:66), and

it is actually rather tempting to do what Eisenstein claimed even a “film novice” would not do: abstract them from the montage and analyse them as if they were indeed easel paintings. However, easel painting itself was out of favour among the leftist avant-garde circles with which Eisenstein identified himself in the early 1920s. Eisenstein’s hostility to pictorialism, however consciously or unconsciously hypocritical it may have been, was consistent with the Russian Constructivists’ rejection of easel painting *tout court* as essentially regressive.

However, Malevich initially saw much to approve of in Eisenstein’s early films. In particular, he liked Eisenstein’s use of montage, or the “law of contrasts” as Malevich called it:

Eisenstein has one advantage over other directors – a certain understanding of the ‘law of contrasts’, an intensification of which should later lead him to non-objectivity by purifying the screen of natural and agitational forms.  
(Qtd. in Shatskikh 1993:474)

On the surface, this quote seems to display a certain hostility towards documentarism and towards political agitation or propaganda in cinema, qualities which were actually the basis of Soviet montage cinema itself. Indeed, it might at first be thought that a “non-objective” art would of necessity be otherworldly and spiritual rather than politically committed, and that abstract Suprematist art would be unsuitable to be used as propaganda or political rhetoric. This is certainly what Eisenstein believed: in 1929, he wrote in his diary that Malevich’s Suprematist movement was “a mixture of mysticism and mystification” (Eisenstein 1988:318,n.52). Eisenstein’s opinion was consistent with the generally accepted view of Malevich as being interested only in individual spiritual transcendence rather than political commitment or collective social transformation. However, this view fails to do justice to Malevich’s complex and sometimes contradictory artistic career and to his actual political commitment to the Bolshevik regime in its difficult early years. For example, he joined the Left Wing Federation of the new Moscow Trade Union of Painters just after the February Revolution, and was elected deputy director of the art department of the Moscow Soldiers’ Soviet. After the October Revolution, he was appointed Commissar for the Preservation of Monuments and Antiquities by the Military-Revolutionary Committee, the very organisation which had planned and executed the Bolshevik Revolution (Tupitsyn 2002b:7). Such a career does not suggest an otherworldly disdain for politics.

In fact, it was his concern for the communicative and political functions of art which led him to move away from easel painting in the early years after the October Revolution and to look to cinema as a way of revitalising the Suprematist movement itself. In Margarita Tupitsyn's words,

With this new orientation came the recognition of painting's inability to participate in individual or collective promotional campaigns, because it was not broadly accessible by the masses. This is why as early as 1920 Malevich claimed "There can be no question of painting in Suprematism. Painting has long been overcome, and the painter himself is a prejudice of the past."<sup>138</sup> (2002a:15)

In the political environment of the first years of the Bolshevik regime, "individual or collective promotional campaigns" clearly meant political propaganda, the use of art to communicate with and to persuade the masses.

Malevich's political orientation during this period is exemplified by his friendship and collaboration with Alexei Gan, the husband of the documentary filmmaker Esfir Shub and a leading proponent of left-wing avant-garde art. Gan supported Malevich during the artistic debates of the early 1920s, insisting for example that he saw "no mysticism" in Malevich's abstract painting *Black Square* (Tupitsyn 2002a:27). And indeed, during this period Malevich was mechanically reproducing the image of his *Black Square* in books, pamphlets, posters and other items in the public sphere. As Tupitsyn notes,

he re-routed the manipulation of *Black Square* from his own sequence of priorities to the public spectacle of its perpetual emergence in propaganda paraphernalia: publications, murals, speaker's rostrums, posters, etc. (2002a:31)

Malevich was systematically deploying his non-objective painting for propaganda purposes in the social sphere rather than for private mystical contemplation. Furthermore, his *Design for a speaker's rostrum* (1920) (reproduced in Tupitsyn (2002a:31)), which combines abstract geometric shapes with an agitative political function, is directly comparable with Gustav Klutssis' more famous designs for the same propaganda tool. Neither design was intended to actually be constructed. However, the point that should be noted is that both Klutssis (an explicitly political and agitative artist) and Malevich (who is usually thought of an apolitical and "mystical" artist) both felt the urge to design the means of production for propaganda and political rhetoric.

Margarita Tupitsyn has drawn attention to the importance of Malevich's collaboration with Gan and its implications for Malevich's status as a political artist:

despite Gan's known collaboration and support, scholars have chosen to underplay Malevich's association with this stalwart Marxist, suggesting at times that Gan was his ideological opponent. This is understandable, considering that any linkage of Malevich with materialist thinking would crumble the wall that has, until now, successfully protected him from political discourse. (2002a:27)

An example of the attempt to maintain that wall is Shatskikh's assertion that

the creator of Suprematism, angered by efforts to place art at the service of some idea or other, whether of social welfare, the class struggle, the aesthetic shaping of life or whatever, saw the gulf which separated him from artists who believed in the value of serving the political and social needs of the Soviet state. (1993:475)

Such an assertion of Malevich's apolitical position can only be sustained by ignoring Malevich's active role in the artistic institutions of the new Bolshevik state (Tupitsyn 2002a:7), his creation of several works of propagandistic art (2002a:43-44) and the political implications of his attack on "the object-oriented canons of both traditional and Modernist art" (2002a:33). Shatskikh is also mistaken in her assertion that Malevich "found no supporters on Soviet soil for his research into 'non-objective' cinematography" (1993:476). Alexei Gan actually devoted significant space in his journal *Kino-fot* to Malevich's non-objective Suprematist art and consistently supported Malevich's ideas and work.

While Eisenstein may have seen only a mysticism detached from politics or reality in Malevich's work, Gan saw something very different in Malevich's non-objective art. In Tupitsyn's words,

Gan's objective [in founding *Kino-fot* in 1922], to figure out "how to organize the life style of the workers' society," was already acknowledged by his contemporaries and gave him the title of "mass agitator." Thus it is all the more significant that he focused a large part of the magazine's fifteen-page editorial section to the issues of non-objectivity. (2002a:28)

Gan, the fanatical proponent of Constructivism and political agitation as the main purpose of art, saw no contradiction between Malevich's abstract, non-objective Suprematism and his own commitment to politicised art which would

intervene in and transform everyday life. On the front page of the very first issue of *Kino-fot*, Gan printed an image of Rodchenko's abstract painting *Non-objective Composition no. 47*, painted when Rodchenko was still associated with Malevich, to illustrate his own article 'Cinematographer and Cinematography'.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, many of Vertov's polemical writings in favour of his own politically committed brand of film-making were to appear in the pages of *Kino-fot*, in particular his founding manifesto 'WE: Variant of a Manifesto'. Malevich's rejection of easel painting at this period and his personal involvement in the institutions of the new Communist regime together with his close collaboration with Gan, all demonstrate his commitment to the creation of political art whose purpose was to communicate with and to stimulate the broad masses of people to political awareness, a "propaganda that stimulates thinking" (Brecht 1966:146). As Malevich proclaimed, "I regard incitement and thought as the chief foundations of life" (qtd. in Tupitsyn 2002b:126).

## 7.2 Malevich, montage cinema and Peircean semiotics

It is not merely the case that montage cinema had some of the characteristics of non-objective art; Malevich's own Suprematist paintings themselves exhibited some of the characteristics of montage. Malevich himself talked about the "law of contrasts", a concept which bears a striking similarity to montage itself. Just as Eisenstein regarded montage as a basic law of artistic creation, so Malevich regarded the "law of contrasts" as being fundamental to all his artistic work. In his own words, "The intuitive feeling found in objects is the energy of dissonance created by the meeting of two opposite forms," and he referred to his painting *Cow and Violin* (1913) as displaying "a moment of struggle through the confrontation of two forms, of a cow and a violin in a Cubist construction" (qtd. in Shatskikh 1993:473). As Shatskikh says, "Almost all Malevich's transrational canvases are constructed to a greater or lesser degree according to the methods of associative montage and supported by the 'law of contrasts'" (1993:473). Malevich in his paintings of the 1910s can therefore be said to have anticipated Eisenstein's own use of "associative montage" in his films of the 1920s.

In fact, it could even be claimed on Malevich's behalf that he directly anticipated Kuleshov's invention of film montage itself in his early Workshop exper-

iments. For example, in his designs for the Cubo-Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913),<sup>140</sup> Malevich used a film projector as a spotlight to illuminate fragments of the scenery, stage props and actors one after the other, isolating them from the surrounding darkness. He was therefore effectively transforming the stage into a sort of cinema screen onto which he was randomly projecting fragments of everyday life and everyday objects, unconnected by any narrative. Shatskikh points out that this procedure “anticipated by a decade the theory of ‘Montage of Attractions’, which was the springboard for Eisenstein’s ‘leap’ from theatre to film in 1923” (1993:474). Just as remarkably, it also anticipated Kuleshov’s early experiments with “films without film” of 1922 in which, due to the absence of useable film stock, short “films” would be performed on a stage using a spotlight to pick out individual objects and “shots” and to simulate such cinematic devices as close-up shots and matches on eyeline. It was by performing such experiments that Kuleshov first invented and then refined the concept of film montage itself.<sup>141</sup> Though I have been unable to find any direct evidence to support my hypothesis, it is entirely possible that Kuleshov was inspired to create his staged “films without film” by his knowledge of the 1913 production of *Victory over the Sun* and Malevich’s famously innovative use of the spotlight to fragment the stage space.

Malevich’s belief that montage cinema could and should develop in the direction of non-objective Suprematism was therefore not entirely without foundation. The meaning of a film sequence in montage cinema was in the contrasts and interrelationships between shots (which Vertov called the “intervals” between shots and between movements within successive shots) rather than in the actual content of the shots themselves, which led to a tendency for the signifiers to become somewhat detached from the signified objects they represented. There was therefore an intrinsic tendency towards abstraction in montage cinema.

Kepley has described the effect of such an approach:

The image’s new relationship with contiguous images in an editing sequence displaced its association with its original referent. Kuleshov’s shot of the White House in his ‘Fabricated Landscape’ sequence no longer referred innocently to a building in Washington, but to a building that existed in a fictional landscape in the minidiagnosis of the sequence. (1992:139)

In other words, the images in montage cinema tend to have more in common with other images than they do with any physical object they supposedly represent.

It was probably the desire to maintain such a “gap” between the signifier and its signified which lay behind Eisenstein’s, Pudovkin’s and Grigori Alexandrov’s rejection of the “talkies” in which synchronised sound merely reinforces “a certain ‘illusion’ of people talking, objects making a noise, etc.” and their assertion that “[t]he first experiments in sound must aim at a sharp discord with the visual images [...] that will result consequently in the creation of a new orchestral counterpoint of visual and sound images” (Eisenstein 1988:113-14) in their collective ‘Statement on Sound’. As Hollis Frampton has noted,

complete dissynchrony between sound and image is to be maintained [...], since the permanent “adhesion” of sound to a given image, as of a name to its referent, increases that image’s “inertia” and its independence of meaning. (1981:63)

That is, the sound of an object should not be directly visually connected with the image of the object which supposedly makes that sound, but must be drawn into the montage of images as another “voice” in the counterpoint, as a sign detached from its signified object. In Plantinga’s words, “sounds are not only recorded (or manufactured), but placed within a textual system for certain rhetorical purposes” (1997:79). Vertov agreed with Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov that sounds could and should be detached from the images of the objects which produce those sounds. However, he differed from them in his insistence that the sounds used in the montage construction of a film must be indexical recordings of the sounds created by real objects in the real world. The asynchronous use of such indexical sound recordings with indexical images would, he believed, allow him to construct an abstract symbolic discourse which could reveal the inner truth of the sounds and images of actuality. In his own words,

Neither *synchronization* nor *asynchronization* of the visible with the audible is at all obligatory, either for documentary or for acted films. Sound and silent shots are both edited according to the same principles and can coincide, not coincide, or blend with one another in various, essential combinations. (Vertov 1984:106; original emphasis)

Vertov asserted that while shooting and editing *Enthusiasm* (1931), he and his film crew “did not limit ourselves to the simplest concurrence of image with sound, but followed the line of maximum resistance – under existing conditions – that of *complex interaction of sound with image*” (1984:111; original emphasis). Given

these tendencies within montage cinema, it is not difficult to see why Malevich initially saw such potential in Soviet montage cinema for it to develop into his proposed Suprematist “non-objective cinema”.

Victor Tupitsyn has made an explicit connection between Malevich’s non-objective art and the nineteenth-century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce’s “second trichotomy of signs”<sup>142</sup> when he wrote that Malevich

often defines the Suprematist form as a “sign,” a “signal,” or a “semaphore,” which is fully in accordance with the rejection of iconism that one would expect from non-objective art. Preference is given to symbolic and indexical signs (in Peirce’s [sic] terminology).<sup>143</sup> (Tupitsyn 2002b:144)

The same connection could also be made between Soviet montage cinema itself and Peirce’s semiotics; in fact, Peirce’s “second trichotomy of signs” has already been applied to cinema in general by Peter Wollen in the early 1970s (1997:116-54). Peircean semiotics can therefore be used as a conceptual framework within which both Malevich’s Suprematist painting and the montage cinema of Eisenstein or Vertov can be analysed in a commensurate way despite the contrasting technical bases of easel painting and cinema.

Peirce’s “second trichotomy of signs” was defined by him in the following way:

[T]here are three kinds of signs which are all indispensable in all reasoning; the first is the diagrammatic sign or *icon*, which exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse; the second is the *index*, which like a pronoun demonstrative or relative, forces the attention to the particular object intended without describing it; the third is the general name or description which signifies its object by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection between the name and the character signified. (Peirce 1991:181)

In short, “[a] sign is either an *icon*, an *index*, or a *symbol*” (1991:239). By his own account, Peirce’s trichotomy was based on the different possible relations between the sign and the thing being signified (1991:183). An icon is a sign which represents its object mainly by being a representation or likeness of it, an index is a sign which has a physical or causal connection with its signified object, and a symbol has only an arbitrary connection with its object by virtue of cultural tradition, and thereby corresponds to Saussure’s arbitrary signifier. A symbolic sign requires neither resemblance to the object it signifies, nor any existential



bond with it. Peirce asserted that photographs combine all three aspects of the sign, having meanings determined by causality, likeness and arbitrary convention within the same image.<sup>144</sup> Cinema, being essentially a succession of still photographic images, also combines all three aspects of the sign to some degree or other.<sup>145</sup> The relative importance of these three aspects will, of course, vary from image to image.

By stating that in Malevich's art "[p]reference is given to symbolic and indexical signs" (Tupitsyn 2002b:144), Victor Tupitsyn is therefore suggesting that Malevich is not attempting to create an illusionistic representation of objects but is more concerned with creating a direct causal connection with the object itself and with manipulating the abstract symbolic aspect of the sign; in other words, "to negotiate a meeting point between the abstract and the real" (Tupitsyn 2002a:43).

It is important to note that all three aspects of Peirce's second trichotomy of signs are co-present to some degree in all signs; it is merely that for many signs one aspect or other may be more significant. As Wollen has pointed out,

Peirce did not consider them mutually exclusive. On the contrary, all three aspects frequently – or, he sometimes suggests, invariably – overlap and are co-present. (1997:123)

In fact, Wollen has suggested that an ideal cinema would keep all three aspects of the sign in equal balance, just as "Peirce believed that in the most perfect of signs the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic would be amalgamated as nearly as possible in equal proportions" (1997:142). In fact, Wollen saw this balance between the three Peircean aspects of the cinematic sign as the source of the aesthetic richness of cinema as an art form (1997:141). This was clearly not the ideal of Soviet montage cinema, nor indeed was it Malevich's ideal for a non-objective Suprematist cinema, which would have downplayed the iconic aspect of the cinematic sign in favour of its symbolic and indexical aspects (Tupitsyn 2002b:144).

Categorising the cinematic signifiers in terms of Peirce's second trichotomy of signs can give a new insight into significant differences between Soviet montage cinema and mainstream classical cinema. As Wollen puts it, "In the [classical] cinema, it is quite clear, indexical and iconic aspects are by far the most powerful. The symbolic is limited and secondary" (1997:140), whereas in montage cinema the abstract, symbolic aspects are far more important. It can also provide an-

other way of interpreting Metz's argument that cinema can be considered to be a language but not a language system [*langue*] (1982a:105). Wollen's statement that "[u]nlike verbal language, primarily symbolic, the [classical] cinema is [...] primarily indexical and iconic" (1997:143) confirms, from a different perspective, Metz's conclusion that the classical cinema has no language system [*langue*], but can nonetheless be considered a language [*langage*] in the sense that "the film, by the mere fact that it must always select what it shows and what it does not show, transforms the world into articulated discourse" (1982a:110,n).

In fact, Wollen provides an example of a kind of cinema which can be considered as far removed from a non-objective Suprematist cinema as possible, that of Von Sternberg:

It was the iconic aspect of the sign which Von Sternberg stressed, detached from the indexical in order to conjure up a world, comprehensible by virtue of resemblances to the natural world, yet other than it, a kind of dream world, a heterocosm.<sup>146</sup> (1997:137)

This is an extreme example of the Hollywood "Dream Factory", the "played" cinema which Vertov attacked so vehemently and which he believed to be poisoning the minds of its working class audiences. As Wollen points out, "the iconic sign is the most labile; it observes neither the norms of convention nor the physical laws which govern the index, neither *thesis* nor *nomos*" (1997:152). This labile character of the iconic sign lends itself to fantasy and to the construction of a dream world, since it lacks either a direct physical connection with the real world or the logical rigor of abstract discourse. While Von Sternberg's films are unusual even for Hollywood in their emphasis on the iconic aspect of the filmic signifier and their detachment from the indexical and the symbolic, they share with mainstream Hollywood films a general neglect of the symbolic aspect of the sign: "Unlike verbal language, primarily symbolic, the [classical] cinema is [...] primarily indexical and iconic" (Wollen 1997:143). In other words, mainstream classical cinema is unable (or, rather, unwilling) to create abstract discourses out of the filmic signifiers. It is only the symbolic aspect of signs which permits abstract discourse to be generated, as Peirce himself noted when he wrote that "the rules of logic [...] have no immediate application to likenesses or indices, because no arguments can be constructed of these alone, but do apply to all symbols" (Peirce 1991:30). Furthermore,

Symbols afford the means of thinking about thoughts in ways in which we could not otherwise think of them. They enable us, for example, to create Abstractions, without which we should lack a great engine of discovery. (1991:251)

Its ability and willingness to construct abstract discourses is one of the most important respects in which Soviet montage cinema differed from mainstream classical cinema, which prefers to construct seamless narratives rather than abstract symbolic discourses. Eisenstein aspired to create a form of “intellectual montage”, and even planned to turn Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* into a film (Eisenstein et al. 1976), while Vertov used montage to construct abstract political arguments from documentary material, as Hicks (2007) has convincingly demonstrated. In Peircean terms, this required, in Eisenstein’s case, a concentration on the symbolic as well as iconic aspects of the filmic signifier. In Vertov’s case, there was an emphasis on the image’s symbolic and indexical aspects rather than its iconic, representational aspect; the precise opposite of the “dream world” conjured up by Von Sternberg’s illusionistic iconic cinema.

The symbolic aspect of the filmic signifier is associated with the “language” of cinema (Saussurean *langage* rather than *langue*), with the communication of abstract ideas and arguments, and with persuasion and rhetoric. Roland Barthes’ distinction between a photograph’s “denotations” and its “connotations” corresponds approximately to the distinction between the photograph’s iconic and indexical aspects on the one hand (denotation) and its symbolic aspect on the other (connotation). As Plantinga puts it,

no photograph used for communication exists purely as denotation; all carry heavy connotational meaning. This ‘photographic paradox’ makes images a rhetorically powerful means of communication, because, for Barthes, the ‘denotated image naturalizes the symbolic message, it innocents the semantic artifice of connotation, which is extremely dense’. (1997:62)

The “innocenting” of its connotation by the denotation of a photograph is analogous to the way in which the “reality effect” created by the suturing process of classical cinema conceals the operations of ideology in the filmic text. Vertov’s aim was to dis-illusion that “innocence” by using montage to subvert the suturing process, using the “[d]ialectical interaction between ontological authenticity of shots/documents [. . .], and their cinematic connotation built by montage structure” (Petric 1978:39).

The association of the symbolic aspect of the filmic signifier with language is paralleled by Malevich's own perception of the need for an "additional element" to be added to his *Black Square* painting to enable it to communicate an abstract symbolic discourse to its viewer – Margarita Tupitsyn has described "black monochrome's longing for [...] [a] linguistic 'additional element,' which makes one wonder whether it annihilates or gives birth to a narrative?" (2002a:109). Malevich first attempted to add this "additional element" by printing a copy of his *Black Square* on the cover of his booklet *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism. A New Painterly Realism* (1916), and by enclosing the image of the *Black Square* in a frame and repeating its framed image inside brochures and other printed publications so that it began to function as a sign rather than an art object and could therefore be "read" as part of a discourse (2002a:17-19). As Malevich wrote in 1918, "Clearly, to [the] intelligentsia [...] picture frames are more readable than paintings" (qtd. in 2002a:17). Vertov's emphasis on the symbolic aspect of the cinematic signifiers in his films also revealed itself in his prolific use of intertitles as an integral part of the rhetoric of his films, a characteristic which Wollen has also noted:

Vertov (or rather Rodchenko, who collaborated with him) was the first to realise the importance of the titles and to integrate them into the film as an element in its construction, rather than as troublesome interruptions. (1997:41)

It is likely that Vertov's and Rodchenko's use of intertitles was at least partly guided by the example of Mayakovsky's famous ROSTA windows, a series of captioned illustrations similar to a comic strip, each with a pointed political message. Viktor Shklovsky has described these ROSTA windows:

Each drawing had a textual significance. The text connected the drawings. If the window posters had been printed without drawings, the text would have had to be changed; otherwise it couldn't have been understood. (1972:142)

Similarly, the images which Vertov intercut with intertitles themselves had textual significance, the "additional element" of symbolic discourse which Malevich tried to add to his own abstract compositions.<sup>147</sup> *The Man with a Movie Camera* is unusual among Vertov's silent films in not having any intertitles, but it has instead a long written manifesto displayed at the start of the film which sets

the conceptual context for the film experiment which is to follow. Indeed, *The Man with a Movie Camera* represented the achievement of Vertov's long term aspiration to eliminate intertitles altogether from his silent films and allow the images to "speak" for themselves through montage.

The Soviet montage directors were trying to achieve the same thing that Wollen describes Brecht as aiming for with his "epic theatre": to penetrate the surface appearances of reality in order to enable the spectator to reach an abstract understanding of reality rather than merely a superficial recognition of it:

Brecht wanted to find a concept of 'representation' which would account for a passage from perception/recognition to knowledge/understanding, from the imaginary to the symbolic:<sup>148</sup> a theatre of representation, mimesis even, but also a theatre of ideas. [...] Ideas, therefore language: it is only with a symbolic (rather than iconic) system that concepts can be developed, that there can be contradiction and hence argument. (Wollen 1976:18-19)

It is worth noting that Brecht's plays are themselves often interrupted by "intertitles", a practice which he borrowed from the silent cinema of the time and which he used to frame each tableau and contextualise its meaning. A cinema which emphasised the indexical and symbolic aspects of the sign rather than its iconic aspect was in fact ideally suited to achieve a "cinema of ideas" corresponding to Brecht's "theatre of ideas", as it could combine the direct indexical impression of reality itself with an abstract symbolic discourse concerning that reality.

Malevich's explicit rejection of "representation" in both painting and in cinema can therefore be interpreted in Peircean terms as a rejection of the iconic aspect of the sign. As Malevich himself said,

the motion picture remains fixed in a three-dimensional illusory realm of of painterly representation. The latter – i.e., painterly "representation" – should encounter resistance just like theatrical art, since the painterly interferes with the cinematic and affects composition and the montage of frames to form a whole. (Malevich 2002:147)

Malevich's position regarding cinema was therefore that insofar as cinema laid claim to being an art form, it should reject the mere depiction of the surface appearances of objects and people in everyday life and instead strive for non-objective abstraction just as easel painting had done, culminating (in Malevich's view) in Suprematism. In Shatskikh's words, "Malevich called on all film directors

to strive towards non-objectivity” (1993:474), and he explicitly condemned the cinema of his time for displaying “the ugly face of life in the form of art” (qtd. in 1993:472), in other words for merely representing the surface appearances of things.

## 7.3 Malevich and the “abstract moments” of montage cinema

The precise terms in which Malevich commended Vertov’s films are significant. Malevich claimed that

I found a tremendous number of elements (frames) of a specifically Cubo-Futurist nature in *The Man with a Movie Camera*. [...] anyone who has seen *The Man with a Movie Camera* remembers a number of episodes attesting to shifts (*sdvigi*)<sup>149</sup> in street and streetcar traffic, all sorts of objects shifting in the various directions of their movement, where the structure of movement goes not only further toward the horizon but also develops vertically. (Malevich 2002:155-56)

According to Margarita Tupitsyn,

Quick to link *Eleventh Year* to Futurism and *The Man with a Movie Camera* to Cubo-Futurism, Malevich praised *Eleventh Year* for achieving “a significant percentage of ‘abstract moments’ ... ” and *The Man with a Movie Camera* for “magnificently underst[anding] the idea or the task of the new montage which expresses a shift [*sdvig*] that did not exist previously.” (2002a:66)

And she asserts that Malevich “watched Soviet films with the sole desire of locating ‘the abstract moments’ – film stills that he mentally converted into surrogate paintings” (2002a:124).

What Malevich meant by the phrase “abstract moments” can best be understood within the conceptual framework of Productivism, a short-lived offshoot of Constructivism with which Rodchenko was closely associated:

the Soviet idea of Productivism, which was theorized in the early 1920s as a way of constructing the notion of abstraction as a collective and industrial rather than an individual and studio enterprise. Never put into

mainstream practice, this idea manifested itself on a symbolic level when concrete objects in photographs and film stills dissolved into surfaces of complete abstraction, and heavy machinery turned into ethereal shapes. (2002a:96)

This is in fact precisely the kind of sign, with its symbolic and indexical aspects emphasised above its iconic aspect, which Victor Tupitsyn has identified as being characteristic of Malevich’s non-objective art (2002b:144) and which I have identified as also being characteristic of Vertov’s montage films. The Productivist abstract image is a dialectical unity of abstraction and actuality – the direct impression of material, physical reality become abstract. The direct, causal imprint of an object is not a representation of that object, but is an abstract symbolic pattern, the texture or *faktura* as the Constructivists termed it, of that object. For example, if an object is placed directly onto the surface of a photosensitive material and is then exposed to light, the resulting photogram will be a direct impression of the object – the image will have an indexical or causal connection with the object itself, and will not be an illusionistic representation of that object. The image will have an abstract, textural quality which has no iconic connection with the object which formed that image.<sup>150</sup> This kind of image or sign is what Tupitsyn has described as the “meeting point between the abstract and the real” (2002a:43) in which abstraction and actuality are no longer merely contradictory opposites but are dialectically linked together in a new “unity of opposites”. As Malevich put it, “We would see not the image of an object but the new content thereof” (Malevich 2002:151). Peirce himself gave an example of a sign which combines symbol and index but not icon: “That footprint that Robinson Crusoe found in the sand [...] was an Index to him that some creature was on his island, and at the same time, as a Symbol, called up the idea of a man” (Peirce 1991:252). It is precisely such images in Vertov’s films which Malevich referred to as “abstract moments”. Such a moment occurs in *The Man with a Movie Camera* when a spinning reel of wire fills the screen and becomes an abstract texture of light and shade, a sign whose iconicity has vanished to leave only its significance as symbol and index (Fig. 7.2). In Bazin’s words, “Thanks to the cinema and to the psychological properties of the screen, what is symbolic and abstract takes on the solid reality of a piece of ore” (2005:168). Vertov was seeking a union of the indexical and the symbolic in his films, a dialectical “unity of opposites”. This combination of abstraction and indexicality into a dialectical unity of opposites

was an essential aspect of his use of montage to construct a rhetorical political discourse.

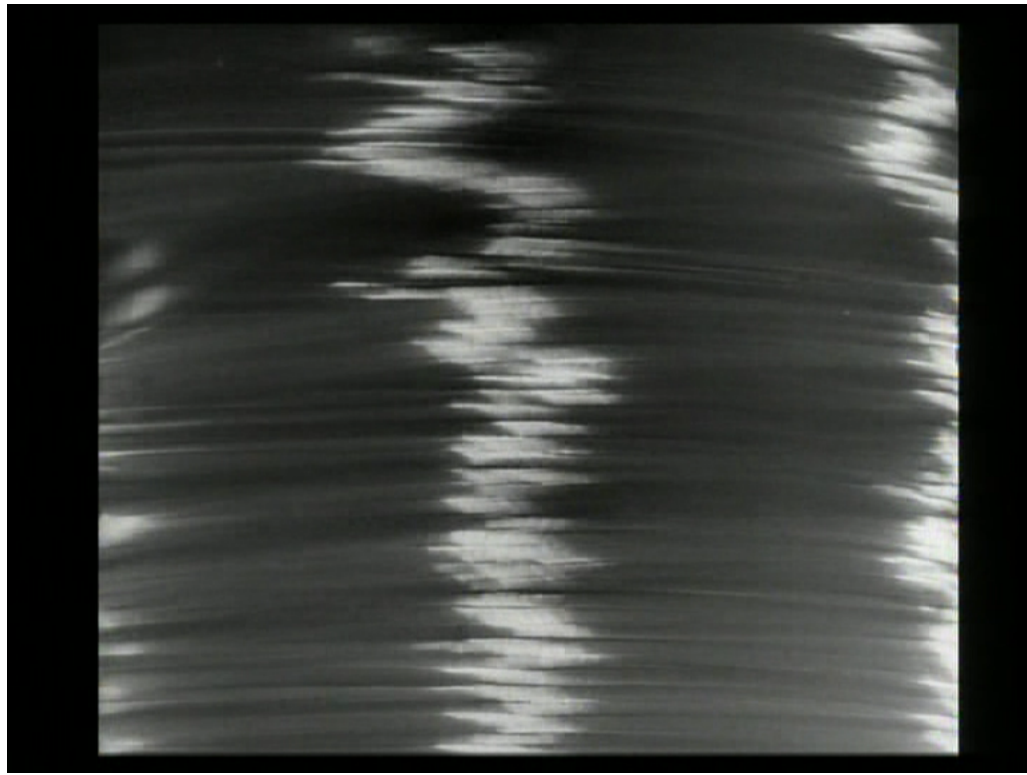


Figure 7.2: Still from Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*.

Similar “abstract moments” occur in Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*, in particular during the famous “cream separator” scene (Figs. 7.3 and 7.4). As Aumont has said of this scene,

the preceding fragments have had almost nothing to do with the codes of realism or figurative codes. It is only at this point that the objects become recognizable as spatial/volumetric figurations, hence making it possible to establish their referent.

There is an emphatic stress on these indices of reality [...]. These objects nonetheless still remain largely unnameable – or even [...] unidentifiable. [...] It is thus difficult to situate their referent “in reality.” (1987:103)

In his article on the system of the suture, Dayan has drawn a connection between the codes of enunciation of classical painting and those of a single frame or static shot in classical cinema:



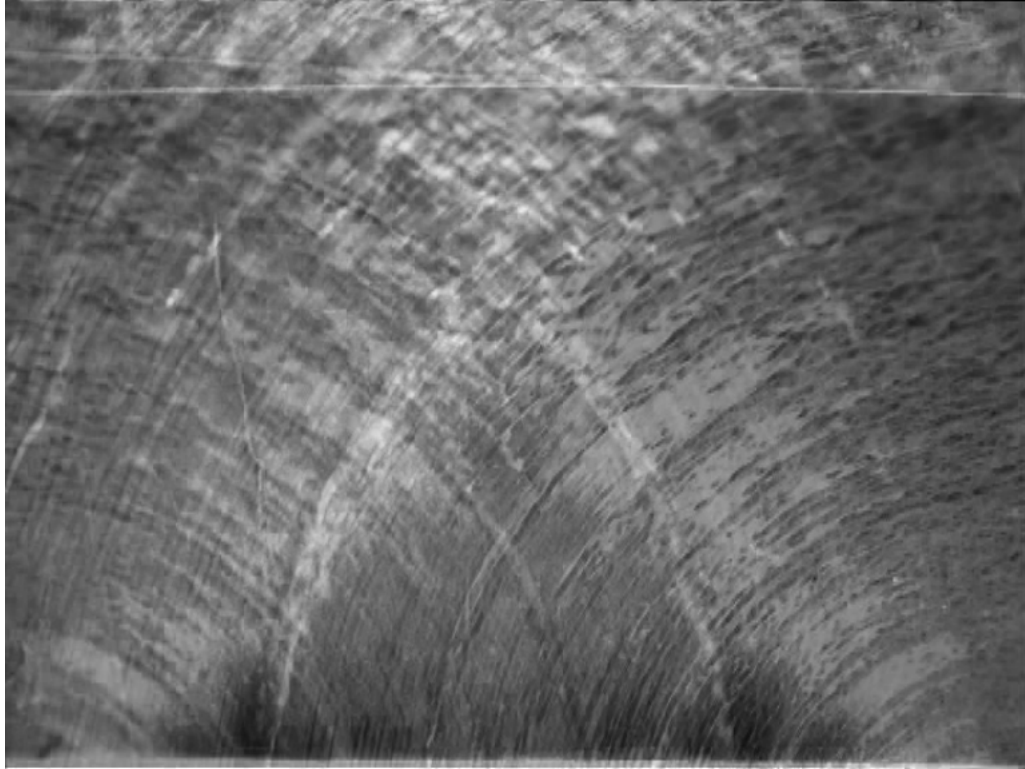


Figure 7.3: Still from Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*.

the filmic image considered in isolation, the single frame or the perfectly static shot, is [...] equivalent to the classical painting. Its codes, even though “analogic” rather than figurative, are organized not merely as an object that is seen, but as the glance of a subject. (1974:27-28)

However, Dayan did not speculate as to whether there could be a cinematic equivalent of the codes of enunciation of avant-garde painting, particularly abstract painting. Such a cinema could well constitute the “cinematography not based upon the system of representation” which Dayan wished for (1974:28). It was in fact Malevich who drew the connection between the non-objective paintings of Suprematism and certain single frames or static shots of Soviet montage cinema, which he called the “abstract moments” of montage cinema (qtd. in Tupitsyn 2002a:66), and who raised the possibility that montage cinema itself might be an example of a cinematography not based on the system of representation, a cinema which (in the terminology of Oudart and Dayan) did not use the system of the suture to produce an illusionistic “reality effect”, but had a direct indexical connection with reality itself. As Eisenstein put it, the Moscow Art Theatre

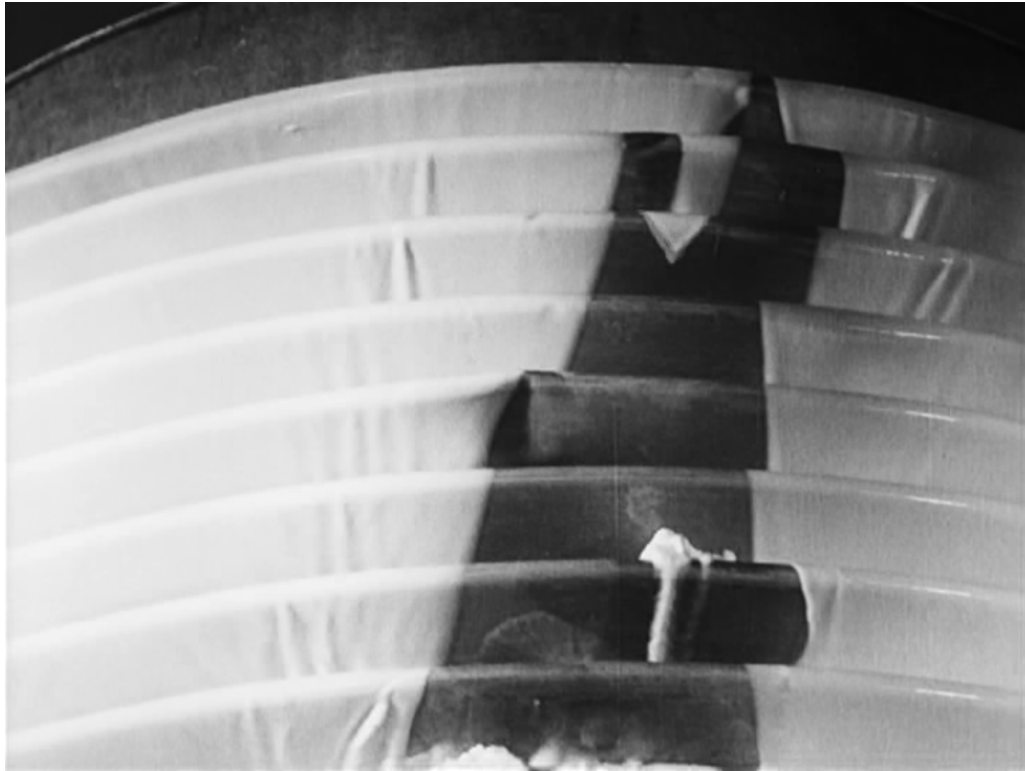


Figure 7.4: Still from Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*.

string their emotions together to give a continuous illusion of reality. I take photographs of reality and then cut them up so as to produce emotions [...]. I get away from realism by going to reality. (Qtd. in Wollen 1997:65)

Whereas classical cinema uses the iconic aspect of the cinematic image to create narratives whose enunciation is invisible and which therefore seem to speak themselves, Vertov had a tendency to suppress the iconic aspect of the image in favour of its indexical and symbolic aspects in order to create abstract political discourses whose enunciation was foregrounded. Rather than an illusionistic representation of the world, Vertov's films present a direct indexical impression of the world rather like a photogram, an impression from which montage can create an abstract symbolic discourse, a political rhetoric to teach the viewer “the communist decoding of the world” (Vertov 1984:42). As Tupitsyn puts it,

Stressing his distance from the realism of traditional cinematography, Vertov settled on the border between [...] abstraction and realism [...]. In the end, Vertov converged on the unity between the formalism of “dynamic geometry, the race of points, lines, planes, volumes,” and “the poetry of

machines, propelled and driving.” (2002a:30)

Vertov’s distance from Constructivism, pace Petrić’s claim (1987) that Vertov’s work represents “Constructivism in film”,<sup>151</sup> is made clear by Tupitsyn when she describes how

Vertov’s program of “dissecting” the Soviet collective body (“millions of ‘I’”) by the laws of geometry replaced the Constructivist agenda of building Soviet reality by way of implantation of man-made utilitarian things and structures. [...] Vertov discarded the notion of the Constructivist *predmet* (thing) as a structural agent of film, and thus, to use Malevich’s expression with regard to Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera*, he “de-objectified the city center.” (2002a:30)

Vertov can therefore be regarded as being at least as much a Suprematist filmmaker as a Constructivist one. His rejection of the Constructivist object as a structural agent of film contrasts with Rodchenko’s use of Constructivist objects in his design for Kuleshov’s film *The Female Journalist* (1927) (sometimes also known as *Your Acquaintance* or *The Presswoman*), in which, as Khan-Magomedov has pointed out,

Rodchenko, who had a shrewd understanding of the role of objects in a film and the kind of influence they wielded over the audience, did everything he could to use *The Presswoman* to promote his new household articles and office equipment. (Khan-Magomedov 1986:191)

This “objective Constructivism” (to coin a phrase) was clearly in danger of becoming almost indistinguishable from the kind of “product placement” which is endemic in the capitalist cinema industry.

Vertov’s emphasis on the indexicality of the image in his films corresponds to what Esfir Shub called the “ontological authenticity” of the cinematic material used by Vertov to construct his films. The term “ontological authenticity” (or “onto-authenticity”) was coined by Shub while assembling her documentary films from authentic newsreel footage dating back to Tsarist times. She described herself as “in the final instance, Vertov’s pupil”, and used the term “ontological authenticity” to describe certain qualities of her own and Vertov’s films (Petrić 1978:43,n.11). Petrić’s gloss on the concept of ontological authenticity is problematic, however: he claims that ontological authenticity “implies the illusionistic as well as factual denotation of motion picture photography” and that “[b]y its very

nature (i.e. ontology), the motion picture projected on the big screen makes the viewer believe that the events occur ‘for real.’” (1978:43,n.11). This, it seems to me, makes the concept of “ontological authenticity” almost indistinguishable from the “reality effect” of classical cinema. Neither Shub nor Vertov were striving for an “illusionistic” cinematic image; in fact, they both regarded illusionistic fictional film-making with hostility. Furthermore, even Hollywood movies want “to make the viewer believe that the events occur ‘for real.’” The source of this blurring of the distinction between ontological authenticity and the reality effect seems to be Petrić’s confusion regarding the ontological aspect of the concept. Petrić claims that it is the ontology of *the cinematic apparatus* to which the concept refers, whereas in my view it is clearly referring to the ontology of *the profilmic actuality*. Shub did not mean that her films and those of Vertov respected the ontology of the cinematic apparatus, whatever that might signify;<sup>152</sup> rather, she meant that their films respected the ontology – the profilmic actuality – of what they filmed or of the old newsreel they used.

In his diary, Vertov insisted that

[i]f an artificial apple and a real one are filmed so that you can’t tell them apart, that shows not skill but the lack of it.

A real apple must be filmed so that any imitation would be impossible. You can bite and eat a real apple but not an artificial one. A good cameraman should make this visible. (Vertov 1984:198)

His opposition to the illusionistic representation of objects and his faith in the indexical authenticity of the filmed image of real objects could not be clearer. Rather than constructing an illusionistic representation of reality, Vertov respected the authenticity of his raw material, the indexical link between the film footage he or his cameraman had shot and the profilmic actuality. He refused to play the illusionistic narrative games of mainstream cinema, or rather he tried to reveal those games for what they were: the sweet poison of the bourgeoisie.

## 7.4 The political implications of non-objective cinema

Malevich used the word “non-objective” [*bespredmetnyi*] to refer not merely to abstract art, in the sense of art which does not have representational subject

matter, but to art which is committed to the de-objectification of aesthetics. In Tupitsyn's words,

In this context of objectless culture, film practices emerge as an art form that provides the conditions for “de-reified” activity, which in this case places itself outside the purview of the object-oriented canons of both traditional and Modernist art, entering fluid and perpetually transforming cine-forms (*kino-formy*).<sup>153</sup> “The greater reality of his [Lenin's] portrait,” Malevich confirms, “is in the cinema. . . .” (2002a:33)

This attack by Malevich on the “thingness” of modern life was essentially an attack on the reification inherent in the capitalist relations of production, and was therefore a political position as much as an aesthetic one. The concept of reification had first been advanced by Marx, who had written about “this personification of things and reification of the relations of production” and claimed that reification “imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them” (Marx 1973:687). Lukács later wrote of reification that

[i]ts basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a “phantom objectivity”, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people. (Lukács 1971:83)

Marx emphasised the way in which reification creates a form of “false consciousness” by concealing the actual relations and meanings of society behind objects: “To [the producers], their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them” (Marx 2000:475). It is this concept of reification which underlies Dayan's statement that classical painting conceals the true relations and meanings of society itself behind the objects which the painting presents to the viewer:

The object represented is a “pretext” for the painting as a “text” to be produced. The object hides the painting's textuality by preventing the viewer from focusing on it. However, the text of the painting is totally offered to view. It is, as it were, hidden *outside* the object. It is here but we do not see it. We see through it to the imaginary object. Ideology is hidden in our very eyes. (1974:26; original emphasis)

The same process also occurs in classical cinema, according to Dayan. The fact that Malevich recognised that his aesthetic attack on reification had a political

dimension is indicated by his statement that “[t]he greater reality of his [Lenin’s] portrait is in the cinema” (Tupitsyn 2002a:33). Tupitsyn has described how

Malevich, as part of a competition for monuments dedicated to Lenin, “proudly exhibited a huge pedestal composed of a mass of agricultural and industrial tools and machinery. On top of the pile was the ‘figure’ of Lenin – a simple cube without insignia.” Still unrecorded in any known published or unpublished documents, this symbolization of Lenin was in tune with Malevich’s own assertion that heroic people and leaders were “pure object-less people [*bespredmetniki*] who do not submit to an image or a brush.” (2002a:43-44)

This “de-reification” of political propaganda would clearly require a new way of presenting Lenin’s image to the masses: not as an object to be fetishised but as a sign combining symbolic and indexical but not iconic qualities, creating a “symbolization of Lenin” rather than a likeness of him. In this respect, Malevich regarded montage cinema, with the exception of some of the films of Vertov, as having failed to de-objectify the human image. Tupitsyn points out that

[i]n his text about Lenin, Malevich returned to the word *lik* [‘iconic image’] to describe the representation of the human face that he urged must be “de-represented” and “de-objectified.” In “And Faces are Painted on the Screens,” he used *lik* in derogatory terms with respect to the close-up of faces he observed while watching such films as Eisenstein’s *The Strike* and Vertov’s *Cine-Truth*. (2002a:74)

Soviet montage cinema itself could be said to have originated with a close-up of a human face – Mozzhukhin’s blank face in Kuleshov’s famous montage experiment onto which emotion and meaning were projected by the spectator – and never achieved, or even aspired to achieve, the true blankness of the faces in some of Malevich’s easel paintings, smooth surfaces which refuse to receive such projected emotions or meanings.

What Malevich actually meant when he talked about “purifying the screen of natural and agitational forms” (qtd. in Shatskikh 1993:474) can now be properly understood. Rather than expressing hostility towards documentarism or towards the use of cinema for political purposes, Malevich was actually expressing hostility towards the iconic representation of objects (“natural forms”) and the fetishised political icon, the Big Brother-like faces of political leaders on every street and in every office which was to become such an inescapable feature of Soviet society

(“agitational forms”). Malevich actually saw the cinema, especially the montage cinema of Vertov, as the art form which could best provide the means to “de-reify” the way people saw reality. This was a political project as well as an aesthetic or spiritual one, and required a new kind of political rhetoric and a new kind of propaganda.

It would therefore be incorrect to assert that Malevich was essentially hostile to the idea of art being used as any kind of political rhetoric or propaganda. Rather, he was hostile only to a particular form of political propaganda, that which involved the “objective” representation of political figures such as Lenin as fetishised icons. His portrayal of Lenin as an abstract cube atop an indexical pile of work tools and his portraits of peasants with blank ovals instead of faces are symptomatic of this approach, strangely reminiscent of some portrayals of the Prophet Mohammed in Islamic art (itself a kind of political propaganda) as a human figure with no face. Malevich detected the same tendency in the films of Vertov: a rejection of iconic representation in favour of the indexicality of the image (the “ontological authenticity” of the film footage, as Esfir Shub called it) and its assemblage into a symbolic discourse by means of montage. This can be contrasted with Eisenstein’s “blasphemous” attempt in *October* to represent Lenin using the non-professional actor Vasili Nikandrov. This attempt to create an illusion of Lenin’s presence, an iconic representation of Lenin using a “type” who looked like Lenin but was not Lenin (i.e. an icon but not an index of Lenin) drew a furious response from Mayakovsky and the other Futurists of LEF. In fact, Eisenstein’s representation of Lenin in *October* is symptomatic of the fact that what Vertov called “played film”, fictionalised film, puts an emphasis on the iconic, illusionistic representation of reality (corresponding to the reality effect generated by the suturing process in classical cinema) rather than on the indexical transfer of reality itself onto the cinema screen (Vertov’s “kino-pravda” or film-truth). By contrast, Vertov presented Lenin using only actual newsreel footage of Lenin – this newsreel footage was the direct imprint made by Lenin himself on the photographic emulsion<sup>154</sup> (or rather, the direct imprint made by the light rays scattered off his body) and was therefore not an iconic representation of Lenin, but was simultaneously an index of Lenin’s erstwhile presence and a symbol of Lenin as founder of the Soviet state. It is this indexical “kino-pravda” coupled with the symbolic discourse generated by montage which constituted an example of the politicised “non-objective cinema” which Malevich aspired to create and

believed Soviet montage cinema might develop into.

## 7.5 Eisenstein contra Malevich

Analysing Soviet montage cinema from Malevich's perspective has therefore revealed an important distinction between the cinema of Eisenstein and that of Vertov: their contrasting attitudes towards the representation of the object. Malevich identified Vertov's approach as tending towards the "non-objective cinema" which he saw as the necessary development of the Suprematist movement, whereas Eisenstein's approach was essentially representational and objective. It was Eisenstein's obsession with things and their iconic representation which Malevich disapproved of. Eisenstein's film *October* manifested this tendency to an extreme degree, so much so that Viktor Shklovsky jokingly referred to it as "a Baroque film about the uprising of dishes" in a letter to Eisenstein (Tsivian 1997:53).

In fact, it was not just Eisenstein who came out badly from the comparison with Vertov. Malevich lambasted Walter Ruttmann's film *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), claiming that

Ruttmann "went junky" ("shurum-burum"). Instead of a dynamic, he showed the junk of day-to-day life falling asleep and waking up. And he, like a "cine-junk collector," used cinematic techniques in order to show all the junk he had collected in "the city of Berlin" to a flea market's frequenters (audience) "in a symphonic perspective."

*The Man with a Movie Camera*, essentially, has no such tendency. Rather, its tendency is to de-objectify the city center without linking any of the elements into a single idea that flows through. Everything there results from shifts, everything comes unexpectedly. Here, for the first time, the elements could not be tied together into a whole in order to express the petty gossip of daily living.<sup>155</sup> (Malevich 2002:158-59)

Malevich expresses his distaste for the "junk" of everyday life very clearly, and he claims for Vertov the same project which Malevich himself famously attempted during his Vitebsk period (1919-22): the "de-objectification" of a city centre. Malevich and his students had created abstract posters and other decorations, gone out into the streets of Vitebsk and superimposed those abstract geometric shapes directly over the old world of everyday objects. In Tupitsyn's words, "Here the 'Suprematist apparatus,' like Vertov's camera, performed the act of the non-



objectification of reality by the means of geometric modules” (2002a:31). This was an act which transformed the private abstract sign of a painting like *Black Square* into a public act of intervention in society itself; that is, into a political act. Malevich believed that our perception of reality must be de-objectified, “de-reified” to express it in Marxist terms, if it is to regain its spiritual aspect. Malevich’s concept of “non-objective cinema” was therefore both a spiritual and (which is less often recognised) a *political* endeavour: “Having trained our camera lens on the yet-to-be-experienced dynamic of metallic, industrial-socialist life, we will be able to see a new world that has not been mediated until now” (Malevich 2002:159).

Eisenstein unequivocally rejected such a “de-objectification” of reality and emphasised instead the importance of the representation of objects:

A generalisation from which the purely representational element has been removed would be a bare, non-objective abstraction dangling in mid-air. [...] so generalised as to be deprived not of the compositional outline [...] but of the actual picture, and retaining only the ‘image-expressing’ zigzag line of its contour. All the ‘pictorial’ and ‘expressive’ qualities would instantly evaporate from the sketch, while the zigzag itself might not be interpreted as a barricade but as [...] *anything you like*: as a graph of the rise and fall of prices, or as a seismographic trace of subterranean tremors, and so on and so forth. It would be open to all these interpretations until the abstraction reverted (as in our case) to the representation of some concrete, objective subject matter. (Eisenstein 1991:97)

However, he also emphasised the importance of the symbolic aspect of the sign as well as the iconic, using the phrase “the generalised image”<sup>156</sup> to describe this abstract, symbolic aspect of the image-sign: “if a grouping of objects aims to depict a barricade, then their disposition should be such that their overall contours indicate an intrinsic, generalised image of what a barricade implies: struggle” (Eisenstein 1991:26). He also asserted that it is the unity of the symbolic and the iconic aspects of the sign (to use Peirce’s terminology) which is the essence of art:

I believe it is in the existence of these two elements – the *specific* instance of depiction and the *generalising* image which pervades it – that the implacability and the all-devouring force of artistic composition resides. (Eisenstein 1991:27; original emphasis)

Eisenstein was therefore arguing in essence that the detachment of signifiers from their signified objects, which I have previously noted as an inherent tendency of montage cinema, should not be carried too far lest the process of abstraction (or “generalisation” as he terms it) makes it impossible to communicate definite ideas. Eisenstein believed that there must be “objective” representation in cinema (as in art generally) in order for there to be an effective political rhetoric. Eisenstein approvingly quoted “the great realist sculptor Mark Antokolsky”, who claimed that “[t]here are two extremes which are bad in art: one is to reduce art to abstraction, the other is blindly to subordinate oneself to nature” (qtd. in Eisenstein 1991:27). Interestingly, this is almost precisely the position which socialist realism was to claim for itself in the 1930s: steering a middle course between formalism and naturalism (Arvon 1973:42-43). His willingness to also adopt this position, apparently sincerely, suggests that Eisenstein was better able to adapt himself to the strictures of socialist realism than Vertov not merely because of a greater willingness to compromise himself or to abandon his previous aesthetic positions, but because he genuinely had some significant areas of agreement with the principles of socialist realism itself.

Eisenstein did not merely reject Malevich’s condemnation of the representation of objects; even more importantly, he dismissed the ultimate *raison d’être* of Malevich’s non-objective Suprematist art – the spiritual transcendence of the material world – as metaphysical nonsense. In 1929, Eisenstein wrote in his diary that Malevich’s Suprematist movement was “a mixture of mysticism and mystification” (Eisenstein 1988:318,n.52). He clearly regarded it as a non-materialist and apolitical worldview, inconsistent with Marxism-Leninism. For Eisenstein, art must exert a definite social and political influence on the masses. Montage cinema, rather than being the exemplar of a putative “non-objective cinema”, should be the vehicle by which the “general line” of the Party could be summarised and propagated to the masses. It was no accident that he originally titled his film about the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture *The General Line* (1929), nor was it an accident that Stalin forced him to change its title to *The Old and the New*. Eisenstein interrupted the shooting of *The General Line* to complete *October* in time for the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. The resulting hiatus in the shooting schedule of *The General Line* meant that the actual “general line” of the Party concerning the collectivisation of agriculture had changed between Eisenstein starting the film and finishing it, so its original title was therefore no

longer appropriate.

Malevich himself seems to have become progressively disillusioned with Eisenstein as a potential harbinger of "non-objective cinema". The terms in which he expressed this disillusionment are very revealing. Malevich accused Eisenstein of being one of the *Peredvizhniki*, or 'Wanderers', a group of nineteenth century Russian artists famous for their naturalistic portrayal of the everyday life of the peasantry:

Eisenstein with all his innovations is an old *peredvizhnik* [Wanderer] who seeks not only to introduce something new into film but also to use all of cinema's technical resources to come up with a picture of the old Wanderers' variety. (Malevich 2002:149)

What Malevich objected to was Eisenstein's concern for the representation of objects, which he associated particularly with AKhRR,<sup>157</sup> a movement of which he said, "at their base they have 'representation' [*izobrazitel'nost'*], and at ours – science and life itself" (Tupitsyn 2002b:73). In a letter to Eisenstein in 1928, he wrote: "You took Mayakovsky's AKhRR leftist line<sup>158</sup> and I do not agree with that line and therefore decline to give you material" (qtd. in Shatskikh 1993:475).

Malevich therefore ultimately sided with Vertov against Eisenstein, rather as the LEF group did, though for different reasons. Unlike the LEF group, it was not Vertov's "documentarism" which he endorsed, but rather the tendency which he perceived in Vertov's films towards non-objectivity, the "abstract moments" and Vertov's emphasis on the symbolic and indexical aspects of the cinematic sign. And also unlike the LEF group, it was not Eisenstein's use of "played" material which he condemned, but rather his emphasis on the iconic, representational aspect of the cinematic sign as well as its symbolic aspect.

## 7.6 Vertov's "kino-eye" and non-objective cinema

Despite his growing disillusionment with Eisenstein's work, Malevich nonetheless retained his faith in Vertov as a potential harbinger of a specifically non-objective cinema. The basis of Malevich's faith can be defined in Peircean terms: Malevich's concept of non-objective cinema, like Suprematist easel painting itself, emphasised the indexical and symbolic aspects of the sign (Tupitsyn 2002b:144). Eisenstein's cinema was primarily iconic and symbolic, while Vertov's was pri-

marily indexical and symbolic and was therefore closer to being non-objective than Eisenstein's.

The indexical aspect of Vertov's film-making was exemplified by his respect for the raw materials out of which he constructed his "film-objects": the celluloid of the film-strip itself and, more importantly, the flow of actuality itself, "life as it is", which it was his task to capture on film by "catching life unawares". Esfir Shub referred to the "ontological authenticity" of the raw material of Vertov's films; in Peircean terms, this authenticity was guaranteed by the causal link between the image on the celluloid and the actuality which had passed in front of the camera lens, in other words by the indexicality of the image: "life, passing through the camera lens, does not vanish forever, leaving no trace, but does, on the contrary, leave a trace, precise and inimitable" (Vertov 1984:45).<sup>159</sup>

Eisenstein was much less concerned with such indexicality and was fully prepared to theatrically stage his films using actors and artificial sets. By placing greater emphasis on the iconic and symbolic aspects of the image than on its indexical aspect, Eisenstein was concerned primarily with the iconic representation of objects and events and their symbolic manipulation using montage to "plough over the audience's psyche" (Eisenstein 1988:62). This is what he called his "kino-fist", in deliberate and ironic contrast to Vertov's "kino-eye".<sup>160</sup>

Vertov did not start with a pre-conceived, abstract idea which he imposed on the material, staging and adapting it to fit his pre-conceived schema. Vertov emphatically asserted his refusal to start a film from a written scenario:

*Kinopravda* doesn't order life to proceed according to a writer's scenario, but observes and records life *as it is*, and only then draws conclusions from these observations. (Vertov 1984:45; original emphasis)

Such a procedure was to become highly problematic once socialist realism had been established by 1934 as the only permissible method of artistic creation in the Soviet Union. In cinema, one of the strictures of the socialist realist method was that the director had to begin with an "iron scenario" [*zheleznyi stsenarii*] which, after being approved by the proper authorities, would become a "steel scenario" [*stal'nyi stsenarii*], which could not be altered: the director would be obliged to follow it precisely while shooting his film.<sup>161</sup> Needless to say, Vertov found it all but impossible to continue making films under these conditions. But while he was still allowed to do so, Vertov would begin with the indexical recording of "life as it is" and move from that to the rhetorical expression of an abstract, symbolic

interpretation of that raw material. Vertov saw this movement as a process of decoding, in fact "the communist decoding of the world" (1984:42). As he put it, "We have come to show the world as it is, and to explain to the worker the bourgeois structure of the world" (1984:73). This movement from the indexical aspects of the cinematic image to its symbolic aspects, linking them together by a process of decoding and explanation is what Vertov referred to as the "kino-eye": a mechanical eye which did not merely passively record actuality but conceptualised and decoded it, indissolubly linking the indexical and the symbolic aspects of the image.

Eisenstein, however, regarded Vertov's film-making methods as being little more than "primitive Impressionism. With a set of montage fragments of real life (of what the Impressionists called real tones), whose effect has not been calculated, Vertov weaves the causes of a pointillist painting" (Eisenstein 1988:62). Even Pudovkin regarded Vertov's practice of starting from the indexical recording of actuality as a hopelessly deficient procedure:

We rejected the method of lying in wait [*podsterezhenie*], the method of the Cine-Eye. If you track events that unfold beyond your control and then show them on the screen, all that you are giving the viewer is raw material. (Pudovkin 2006:20)

Of course, both Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's criticism of Vertov's work is based on a misinterpretation of what Vertov was actually trying to do. Far from being a mere Impressionist, Vertov was using montage to construct rational, abstract arguments out of his indexical raw material, as Hicks (2007) has clearly demonstrated; indeed, Vertov asserted that he applied montage to the raw material even during the shooting process itself (Vertov 1984:72).

But Vertov's starting point was always the indexical raw material drawn from life itself. Vertov always used the method, as he asserted, of "[p]roceeding from the material to the film-object (and not from the film-object to the material)" (Vertov 1984:35). It was the fact that he always began with the indexical image of life itself which, in his own view, enabled Vertov to achieve the successful "decoding of the world". The words of Jean Epstein are perhaps apposite here:

I am certain [...] that if a high-speed [i.e. slow motion] film of an accused person under interrogation were to be made, then from beyond his words, the truth would appear, writ plain, unique, evident; [...] there would be no further need of indictment, of lawyers' speeches, nor of any proof other

than that provided from the depths of the images. (Qtd. in Michelson 1984:xliv-xlv)

Epstein was asserting the authenticity of the indexical cinematic image of reality, its inherent ability to capture the truth (the "kino-pravda") of the object. Vertov himself cited his leap from the first floor of a grotto in Moscow in 1918, filmed in slow-motion, as evidence that the indexical recording of reality by a camera could reveal inner existential states such as indecision, tension or relief (Tode and Wurm 2006:82,n.4).<sup>162</sup> Vertov summarised his conclusions from the experiment in 1935:

The results. From the point of view of the ordinary eye it goes like this: the man walked to the edge of the balcony, bowed, smiled, jumped, landed on his feet and that is all. What was it in slow motion? [...] On the man's face are clearly seen his thoughts. (Qtd. in Feldman 1977:36)

This revelation of the normally hidden truth was the entire *raison d'être* of the kino-eye:

Not "filming life unawares" for the sake of the "unaware," but in order to show people without masks, without makeup, to catch them through the eye of the camera in a moment when they are not acting, to read their thoughts, laid bare by the camera. (Vertov 1984:41)

This revelatory power of the camera which Vertov believed he had discovered could be regarded as the inverse of the Kuleshov Effect. Vertov claimed that the camera reveals what is already there but hidden beneath surface appearances, whereas Kuleshov claimed that the spectator projects what is not there onto the blank surface of the actor's expressionless face. What Vertov understood by "kino-pravda" was precisely the capability of the camera to draw out the inner truth of an object, to reveal and inscribe that truth on the object's surface, or rather on the surface of the indexical image of that object. Clearly, if the object being filmed is a mere stage-prop, a fake, then it will possess no inner truth to be revealed and the kino-eye will fail to work its magic. Vertov used the example of the filming of an apple to make this point:

[i]f an artificial apple and a real one are filmed so that you can't tell them apart, that shows not skill but the lack of it.

A real apple must be filmed so that any imitation would be impossible. You can bite and eat a real apple but not an artificial one. A good cameraman should make this visible. (Vertov 1984:198)

The process of grasping reality both perceptually and conceptually through the kino-eye will therefore only be successful if it is applied to material which is genuinely derived, by an indexical process of mechanical recording, from everyday life itself.<sup>163</sup> Any staged or "played" material will reveal nothing but its own vacuity to the kino-eye. But with the right material, Vertov believed that the movie camera could be a cognitive instrument of unrivalled power which he could use to reveal political truths about the structure of reality. Vertov's ultimate ambition in striving for the dialectical unity of perception and abstract thought by unifying the indexical and symbolic aspects of the cinematic image was essentially the same as that of Marx: "The eye has become a human eye when its object has become a social, human object produced by man and destined for him. Thus in practice the senses have become direct theoreticians" (Marx 2000:100). In Feldman's words,

To be able to perceive the meaning of images the way Newton was able to perceive the meaning of a falling apple and Pavlov that of a salivating dog still serves as a definition of the function of what Vertov would later call the "Cinema Eye."<sup>164</sup> (1977:30)

This is the precise opposite of the illusionistic representation of objects which the "played" cinema which Vertov so despised aims to achieve. Vertov wanted not illusion but truth, not to represent but to reveal.

Vertov's use of slow-motion as a device to better reveal the inner truth of his leap from the balcony is significant. Vertov believed that the movie camera could enhance and extend the human senses. The ability of the movie camera to slow down or speed up the passage of time, to magnify or reduce objects, to *capture* the present moment in a way which the unaided human eye cannot, is what enables it, in Vertov's view, to interrupt the continuity of the surface flow of actuality and reveal the normally hidden inner truth of objects and people and inscribe it symbolically on the indexical cinematic image, to be read and decoded by the cinema audience. The desire to capture the passing moment, often using slow-motion, in order to analyse and conceptualise it is actually characteristic of Soviet montage cinema in general. Barthes described Eisenstein's cinema as being, like Brecht's theatre, a "series of pregnant moments" (1977:73), and Pudovkin's films contain

many instances in which slow-motion is used to enhance the affective qualities of a scene or to focus the spectator's attention on a specific detail; for example, when the firing squad which is about to execute Bair in *Storm Over Asia* (1929) turn in unison, the film momentarily slows down to extend and emphasise that moment. Indeed, Pudovkin was later to write that "it occurred to me that temporal as well as spatial constructions can be used to focus the viewer's attention on details" (Pudovkin 2006:185) and "a person who scrutinises, studies and absorbs something changes spatial and temporal relationships: *he brings closer what is distant and slows down what is fast*" (2006:187; original emphasis). He concluded that "[s]low motion in montage is not a distortion of an actual process. It is a portrayal that is both more profound and more precise, deliberately guiding the attention of the audience" (2006:190). However, both Eisenstein and Pudovkin regarded slow-motion as merely a handy cinematic technique to be deployed whenever a particular rhetorical point needed to be underlined; neither of them regarded it as in itself a means of revealing the inner truth of reality in the same way that Vertov did. Vertov was obsessed with the ability of the "kino-eye" to manipulate the passage of time, slowing it down, speeding it up, even reversing or freezing it altogether. In 1922, Vertov had even proposed to the authorities that he be allowed to make a documentary film to be called *Time Stood Still*, which would portray "cross-sections of life in Moscow suddenly suspended in frozen time" (Tode and Wurm 2006:93); however, the proposal was rejected by the authorities.<sup>165</sup> In fact, Vertov regarded the "film-object" itself as in some sense transcending the temporal flow: a film can be projected over and over again, exactly repeating the same scenes and events. Each passing moment in a film therefore loses its quality of being a unique, ungraspable and unrepeatable moment in the temporal flow and becomes conceptually graspable by the spectator.<sup>166</sup> This concept may be part of what underlies Burch's assertion that *The Man with a Movie Camera* can only be grasped by a spectator who has seen it multiple times and therefore has "a completely topological grasp of the film as a whole" (1979:94); Burch's use of a spatial rather than a temporal metaphor is significant, since it ascribes a timeless quality to the film when it is properly "grasped" by the spectator.

Hicks has correctly noted that

Vertov [...] maintained a [...] dual commitment, on the one hand to the capacity of cinema to record as a starting point, and on the other to exploring and unleashing its creative, persuasive, analytical potential.



(2007:10)

However, he also claims that "[t]here is always a compromise between a search for new and more striking visual – and, later, sound – solutions, on the one hand, and the need to articulate a message, on the other" (2007:3). In my view, however, there is no such "compromise" in Vertov's work: the two aspects of his film-making – the indexical recording of actuality and the symbolic articulation of an argument from that raw material – are essentially complementary rather than contradictory activities. It was the indexical recording power of the movie camera which ensured the ontological authenticity of the raw material of his films, and it was his use of montage to break up the continuity of the surface flow of actuality which enabled him to reveal the hidden meanings of the real world and to construct an abstract rhetorical argument from that raw material. As Petrić has said of Vertov,

his concept of how to construct a genuine "film-thing" in the documentary cinema was meant to be dialectical on the phenomenological as well as the structural level. In other words, "Truth" presented on the screen must be essential and not mechanical, ideologically functional rather than commercially entertaining. (1978:32)

Only montage could achieve this aim, by fragmenting the surface flow of actuality and reassembling it into an abstract ideological discourse about the world. As Vertov put it, "the film is not only the sum of the facts recorded on film, or, if you like, not merely the sum, but the product, a 'higher mathematics' of facts" (Vertov 1984:84).<sup>167</sup> There was therefore no contradiction between the indexical "content" of his films and their rhetorical "form"; rather, there was a fundamental unity of content and form, as Vertov himself claimed (1984:183), based upon the dialectical unity of the indexical and symbolic aspects of the cinematic image. The belief that, according to Marxist principles, the surface appearance of reality can be misleading led Vertov – an avowedly Marxist film-maker – to try to reveal the truth concealed behind those surface appearances by slowing, fragmenting, analysing and reassembling the indexical images captured by the movie camera. It is the same belief which lay behind Brecht's famous comment about the photograph of a Krupp factory revealing nothing about the actual economic and social reality behind that "realistic" image:

The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So there is indeed 'something to construct', something 'artificial', 'invented'. Hence, there is in fact a need for art. But the old concept of art, derived from experience, is obsolete. For those who show only the experiential aspect of reality do not reproduce reality itself. (Silberman 2000:164-65).

The means by which those hidden relations might be revealed was actually suggested by Lenin himself in his *Philosophical Notebooks*:

We cannot imagine, express, measure, depict movement, without interrupting continuity, without simplifying, coarsening, dismembering, strangling that which is living. The representation of movement by means of thought always makes coarse, kills – and not only by means of thought, but also by sense-perception, and not only of movement, but *every* concept. And in that lies the *essence* of dialectics. And precisely *this essence* is expressed by the formula: the unity, identity of opposites. (Lenin 1976:259-60; original emphasis)

Lenin's rather Hegelian position<sup>168</sup> is that in order to grasp reality conceptually (and, by implication, artistically), it is necessary to interrupt its continuity, to freeze its dialectical self-movement in order to analyse it. He suggests that these frozen "moments" of conceptualisation are in fact the essence of the dialectical method and involve the "unity of opposites". There is an interesting parallel here with Malevich's cherry-picking of "abstract moments" from montage films, and the unity of indexical authenticity and symbolic abstraction in such moments. And Lenin's insistence on the necessity of "interrupting continuity" almost implies an endorsement of montage as a dialectical method of grasping and revealing the truth about the world.

In Vertov's view, montage – which Malevich referred to as "the law of contrasts" – was required to reveal (*not* to represent) the internal contradictions and structures of exploitation concealed beneath surface appearances. Plantinga has claimed that "I see no reason why, if a subject is complex and contradictory, it cannot be represented as such in a seamless, unified representation that

proclaims its complexity" (1997:198). However, the "seamless, unified representation" which Plantinga favours – for example, the seamless narratives of classical cinema, whose diegetic illusionism is underpinned by the system of the suture – cannot reveal the workings of its own ideology to the spectator, and cannot penetrate the iconic likeness of things to reveal the internal contradictions and conflicts concealed by those surface appearances. Plantinga is correct in stating that a film's discourse need not imitate the form of its projected world. However, Vertov was not attempting to imitate or represent the surface appearance or even the structure of the world in his films; rather, he was attempting to *reveal* it. The rhetorical strategy of Vertov's film-making was therefore intimately linked with his Marxist political ideology and with his tendency towards what Malevich called "non-objective cinema", a cinema which does not represent the world but instead seeks to reveal it.

# Chapter 8

## Conclusions

### 8.1 Summary of the conclusions

The Russian Revolution of 1917 created a political environment which placed a much higher value on propaganda than had existed previously. The experiences of montage film-makers such as Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Vertov as participants in the propaganda endeavours of the Bolshevik regime, for example on board the “agit-trains” or shooting short *agitki* films on the various fronts of the Civil War, meant that they were acutely aware of the propaganda potential of cinema, and indeed perceived the main purpose of cinema to be to serve as a propaganda medium for the new, embattled Soviet state.

The Soviet montage film-makers also learned much about how to use cinema to exert a rhetorical effect on an audience from the work of D. W. Griffith, whose impact, I have argued, was not so much in terms of his aesthetic or technical breakthroughs in the art of film-making than in his demonstration at a crucial moment in cinema’s development that it could be used to produce powerful political and emotional effects on a mass audience. This demonstration had a particularly strong effect on Pudovkin, though Griffith exerted a strong influence over all the Soviet montage directors with the important exception of Vertov. Griffith, through his epic film *Intolerance* (1916) in particular, had a decisive impact on the development of the Soviet montage film-makers as rhetoricians and propagandists.

They were also affected by artists closer to home, of course. Vertov in particular regarded himself as a disciple of Vladimir Mayakovsky and was influenced both by his aesthetic ideas as well as by his insistence on the political tendentiousness

of art. The Cubo-Futurists' poetic device of *zaum* was particularly important for Vertov, especially with regard to the way in which *zaum* concentrated on the juxtaposition of signifiers with each other rather than on the signifiers' reference to their signifieds. This was also to become a general tendency of montage cinema itself, and reinforced its status as an integral part of the astonishing ferment of the artistic avant-garde in 1920s Soviet Russia.

The Soviet montage directors all perceived themselves to be propagandists as well as (or in Vertov's case, instead of) artists. However, the definition of propaganda is a contentious one. Propaganda is actually a complex phenomenon with many different modalities and strategies, a fact which has important implications for Soviet montage cinema's functioning as a medium for political propaganda.

I concluded that the usual definitions of propaganda tend to be too narrowly restrictive and have too many ideological presuppositions to properly encompass the full range of uses for which propaganda was being employed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. In particular, the reciprocal relationship between propaganda and its recipient is often neglected in most analyses of propaganda. Propaganda tends to be viewed as a one-way process, as the mere imposition of the propagandist's views on the propagandee's passive psyche. Richard Taylor's study of the film propaganda of the Soviet Union and of Nazi Germany (Taylor 1998) seems to me to suffer from this failing, despite its other great merits. His somewhat restrictive and almost entirely negative view of the nature of propaganda leads to his statement that "[t]he 'propagandist' deals not in the drugs of stimulation but in those of sedation" (1998:13) and his assertion that it is always aimed at ending the thought process of the propagandee rather than stimulating it. Actually, there is a transactive relationship between the propagandist and the propagandee and a more nuanced view of propaganda, one which takes into account its various modalities and strategies as well as its transactive nature, is therefore required if the nature of Soviet montage cinema as propaganda is to be properly understood.

In particular, I have both affirmed and investigated the link between propaganda and rhetoric as a means of constructing persuasive discourses. This link is often denied, for example by Bennett and O'Rourke (2006), who contrast "good" rhetoric, which they claim appeals to reason, with "bad" propaganda, which they claim appeals to the emotions. This distinction was simply not recognised by the Soviet montage film-makers. If rhetoric is incorporated into our understanding of the nature of propaganda, this can enrich our definition of propaganda suffi-

ciently to enable us to properly analyse the ways in which Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Vertov, in their various ways, used montage in the enunciation of their filmic texts in order to achieve a rhetorical and propagandistic effect on the spectator.

In this respect, it has proven useful to divide the concept of propaganda into two categories: agitation propaganda and integration propaganda (Ellul (1973:70-79) and Jowett and O'Donnell (1992:8)). This is a distinction based on the differing audience response which the two categories of propaganda attempt to evoke. The essential deficiency of Taylor's approach can therefore be seen to be his failure to make a distinction between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda; instead, he implicitly categories all propaganda as integration propaganda. In fact, while Hollywood cinema operates essentially as an integration propaganda, Soviet montage cinema is a form of agitation propaganda.

It is also helpful to divide propaganda into two further categories: vertical propaganda and horizontal propaganda (Ellul 1973:79-82). This proved useful in distinguishing between the different approaches towards propaganda taken by Eisenstein and Pudovkin on the one hand and by Vertov on the other. This difference was rooted in their view of the appropriate relationship between the propagandist and the propagandee. Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's approach was based on the idea that a propaganda film should communicate the propagandist's pre-existing message as clearly as possible, while the spectator's role was to be an unfree (though not passive) recipient of that message. Vertov's approach, by contrast, was far less coercive and relied more on the spectator's active and creative co-constitution of the "message" of his propaganda films. Eisenstein and Pudovkin were using the methods of vertical propaganda while Vertov was using the methods of horizontal propaganda.

By regarding propaganda as a complex phenomenon with various modalities and strategies rather than taking the restricted and undifferentiated definition usually employed in studies of Soviet cinema, it is possible to gain greater insight into the different and sometimes conflicting modes of propaganda being used by the Soviet montage directors. In particular, it is now possible to classify the films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin as transactive, vertical agitation propaganda and the films of Vertov as transactive, horizontal agitation propaganda.

The nature of the actual mechanism by which the filmic text interacts with the spectator in order to cause a change in that spectator's psyche, the change

that will constitute the rhetorical effect of the film on the spectator, was investigated. My conclusion was that a plausible candidate for such a mechanism has been proposed by Marshall W. Alcorn (1987). I applied Alcorn's model to the "Kuleshov Effect" montage experiment in order to investigate the appropriateness of the model for an analysis of the way in which Soviet montage cinema achieves its rhetorical effect on a spectator.

The role of the spectator in the constitution of the rhetorical effect of the montage films is so problematic that a transactive model of their rhetorical effectivity is clearly necessary. I found that Alcorn's approach is capable, in my view, of providing such a transactive model. The essence of his model, expressed in cinematic rather than literary terms, is that a filmic text bring rhetorical pressure to bear on the spectator while the spectator simultaneously brings his or her "projective idealization" to bear on the filmic text. The subjectivity of the spectator therefore constitutes the signification of the filmic text while the filmic text simultaneously modifies the subjectivity of the spectator. The meaning of the filmic text is thereby generated by a transactive rhetorical process.

This transactive model for rhetorical effectivity permits a more complex and nuanced view of the operation of propaganda than the more one-sided interpretations of propaganda as essentially a one-way process, as is the case with Kenez (1985) or Taylor (1998), for example, who implicitly portray the Soviet people as passive receptacles for Bolshevik propaganda (Kenez 1985:255). The implication of such a rather impoverished description of the way in which propaganda actually operated in the Soviet Union is that the spectator is nullified as a political subject; political intervention becomes a redundancy because the meanings of the filmic text are unalterably fixed by the film-maker and cannot be constituted or challenged by the spectator. The montage directors, however, wanted to stimulate the spectator into becoming an active political agent.

Applying Alcorn's model of transactive rhetoric to Soviet montage cinema has also helped to clarify the aesthetic strategies being used by, for example, Vertov in his film *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Vertov exploits the mismatch between the spectator's projection of their narrative expectations (their "projective idealization") onto the filmic text and the rhetorical pressure exerted by the film's actual signifiers by deliberately triggering and then frustrating their projected expectations. Vertov was, in effect, absorbing the spectator's projective forces and deflecting them towards ideological and political ends. This provides

a potentially more fruitful way of analysing Vertov's strategy in *The Man with a Movie Camera* than Williams' formalist analysis (1979), as it foregrounds the actual interaction between the filmic text and the spectator.

The application of Alcorn's model to the Kuleshov Effect experiment has shed light on the problematic status of the Effect itself, in particular the general lack of success of attempts to reproduce the Effect under scientifically rigorous conditions (Prince and Hensley 1992). My conclusion is that the deterministic and manipulative interpretation of the Effect which Kuleshov himself proposed, based on a crudely understood scientism and a mechanistic materialism, is inadequate for a proper analysis of his own Effect. Furthermore, the application of Alcorn's model to Kuleshov's montage experiment actually has implications for Alcorn's model itself. Since the meaning of the iconographic signifiers in the film footage used in the experiment is produced by the juxtaposition of those signifiers, it follows that, contrary to Alcorn's assertion, it is not the signifiers of the filmic text in themselves which impose their "authority" on the spectator, but the *montage* of those signifiers which imposes *its* "authority" by exerting rhetorical pressure on the spectator's projective idealisations and thereby changing the spectator's "linguistic constitution of the self".

The relationship between Soviet montage cinema and classical cinema can by no means be reduced to one of simple opposition. In fact, the Soviet montage directors were reacting against some of the characteristics of Russian Tsarist cinema more than against classical cinema, which had not yet completed its full development when film montage was first being established (Bordwell et al. 1985). In order to explore the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between Soviet montage cinema and classical cinema, it was therefore necessary to examine the nature both of the classical cinema and of Tsarist cinema, which itself differed in significant ways from the classical style. In fact, many of the methods of the new Hollywood classical style seemed to the Soviet montage film-makers to be ideally suited for the purposes of propaganda. Their aim was therefore to take those elements of classical cinema which they regarded as the most progressive and change their function from merely providing entertainment and diversion to the communication and reinforcement of political ideology. In the terminology used in the analysis of the classical style by Bordwell (1985:1-84), the Soviet montage directors adopted (and adapted) many of the *devices* of the continuity style, but did not adopt its *systems* (narrative, time and space), nor its *relations*



*of systems* (1985:6).

Furthermore, the “system of the suture”, which has been theorised as a defining characteristic of classical cinema (Oudart (1978), Dayan (1974)), must be employed in order to understand the way in which the ideology of a film exists not merely on the level of the fiction or narrative of a film, but also on the level of the enunciation of the filmic text itself; that is, the process by which fragments of raw film footage are transformed into meaningful cinematographic statements. The theory behind the system of the suture asserts that the ideological effect of a classical film on its audience is not primarily through its fiction or the content of the film, but through its enunciation. The process by which the spectator is sutured or “stitched into” the filmic text is analogous to the Althusserian ideological interpellation of the individual as a subject and has the effect of naturalising the ideology of the film, making it seem to be an inevitable and inescapable aspect of reality itself, something to be taken for granted. The fiction of a classical film might therefore not be overtly ideological, but its enunciation is *always* ideological. As Eisenstein himself said of montage cinema, “Form is *always ideology*. And form always turns out to be *real ideology*. That is, ideology that *really* applies and not what passes for ideology in the idle prattle of the talkers” (Eisenstein 1988:241; original emphasis). It is this embedding of ideology into the enunciation of the filmic text which enables classical Hollywood cinema to successfully function as a form of integration propaganda. My conclusion was that the system of the suture applies to montage cinema as well as to classical cinema, albeit in a modified form and in a manner which continually subverts that system, and that it is this which enables montage cinema to function specifically as a form of agitation propaganda rather than integration propaganda.

The system of the suture can therefore provide a new way of understanding the difference between Soviet montage cinema and classical continuity cinema at the level of enunciation rather than merely in terms of their technical procedures or political content. In particular, the Kuleshov Effect can be interpreted in terms of the system of the suture. This has two benefits. Firstly, the system of the suture can potentially reveal new ways of understanding the psychoanalytic basis of the Kuleshov Effect itself, and can perhaps make it more plausible that such an effect does indeed exist (an assumption which has been challenged in recent years, for example by Aumont (1986) and Prince and Hensley (1992)). And secondly, the Kuleshov Effect (assuming it does exist) could potentially illuminate

aspects of the system of the suture itself. In particular, the Kuleshov Effect poses in a particularly acute form the question raised by Dayan: “what happens to the spectator-image relation by virtue of the shot-changes peculiar to cinema?” (1974:28). Analysing the work of the different montage directors in terms of the system of the suture has also given a new perspective on their different positions with respect to classical cinema and the system of the suture. The subversion of the suturing process at the level of the enunciation is a significant aspect of montage cinema’s nature as political rhetoric. Just as the analyst’s refusal to suture (Heath 1981:85) can enable the analysand to be “cured”, the montage film-makers’ refusal to entirely suture the spectator into the filmic text enables them to de-naturalise the ideology embodied in the enunciation of their films and thereby free the spectator from the “trap” of being ideologically interpellated by the suturing process.

Dayan has pointed out that both classical painting and classical cinema are organised by “the system of representation”, which functions as a means of concealing the operations of ideology behind the illusionistic representation of objects presented for a subject to gaze upon, using the system of the suture to create the “reality effect” (1974:26). Dayan asked whether there can be a cinematography not based on the system of representation, and answered his own question in the negative (1974:28). However, Dayan did not speculate as to whether there could be a cinematic equivalent of the codes of enunciation of avant-garde painting, particularly abstract painting. Such a cinema could well constitute the “cinematography not based upon the system of representation” which Dayan wished for (1974:28). In film montage, the signification of a cinematic sequence is not in the images themselves but in their juxtaposition. This means that the interrelationship between the signifiers matters more than the relationship between the signifiers and their signifieds, which implies that there was therefore an intrinsic tendency towards abstraction present in montage cinema. In fact, just as Dayan has emphasised the connection between the codes of classical painting and those of the single frame or the static shot of classical cinema, so Kazimir Malevich, one of the leading figures of avant-garde art at that time, described some of the frames or shots of montage cinema as “abstract moments” sharing much in common with non-objective Suprematist painting. While the potential of the Soviet montage cinema of the 1920s to be such a non-representational cinema never fully materialised, that potential was recognised at the time by Malevich. I therefore

examined Malevich's concept of "non-objective cinema" and investigated to what extent montage cinema conformed to Malevich's concept and what implications this had for the political and ideological functioning of montage cinema.

I found it necessary to challenge widespread misconceptions about Malevich in order to clarify the connection between Malevich's ideas and those of the montage film-makers. Malevich is usually regarded as a "mystical" artist interested primarily in personal spiritual transcendence rather than the political transformation of society (see, for example, Shatskikh (1993)). In fact, Malevich was a more politically committed artist than is generally believed, and was far from being an isolated figure in 1920s Soviet Russia; for example, Shatskikh is mistaken in her assertion that Malevich "found no supporters on Soviet soil for his research into 'non-objective' cinematography" (1993:476). Furthermore, the attack on the "thingness" of modern life which Malevich's "non-objective art" represented was essentially an attack on the reification inherent in the capitalist relations of production, and was therefore a political position as much as an aesthetic one. It is this concept of reification which underlies Dayan's statement that classical painting (and classical cinema) conceals the true relations and meanings of society itself behind the objects which the painting presents to the viewer.

In fact, it is not merely the case that montage cinema had some of the characteristics of non-objective art; Malevich's own Suprematist paintings themselves exhibited some of the characteristics of montage, as Shatskikh has correctly pointed out (1993:473). Indeed, Malevich's non-objective art and Soviet montage cinema can be theoretically related to each other using Peircean semiotics. Victor Tupitsyn (2002b:144) has made an explicit connection between Malevich's non-objective art and C. S. Peirce's "second trichotomy of signs" (based on the different possible relations between the sign and the thing being signified), in which the sign can be classified as either an icon, an index or a symbol. Furthermore, Peircean semiotics has been applied to cinema in general by Peter Wollen in the early 1970s (Wollen 1997:116-54). I therefore used Peircean semiotics as a conceptual framework within which both Malevich's Suprematist painting and montage cinema could be analysed in a commensurate way despite the contrasting technical bases of easel painting and cinema.

Malevich's explicit rejection of "representation" in both painting and in cinema can be interpreted in Peircean terms as a rejection of the iconic aspect of the sign in favour of its indexical and symbolic aspects. This kind of image or sign is what

Tupitsyn has described as the “meeting point between the abstract and the real” (2002a:43) in which abstraction and actuality are no longer merely contradictory opposites but are dialectically linked together in a new “unity of opposites”.

Malevich originally regarded only Eisenstein and Vertov as potential Suprematist film-makers; however, he gradually became increasingly disillusioned with Eisenstein’s work and eventually regarded only Vertov as a potentially proponent of non-objective cinema. Whereas classical cinema uses the iconic aspect of the cinematic image to create narratives whose enunciation is invisible and which therefore seem to speak themselves, Vertov had a tendency to suppress the iconic aspect of the image in favour of its indexical and symbolic aspects in order to create abstract political discourses whose enunciation was foregrounded. This combination of abstraction and indexicality into a dialectical unity of opposites was an essential aspect of his use of montage to construct a rhetorical political discourse. It is this indexical “kino-pravda” coupled with the symbolic discourse generated by montage which constituted an incipient example of the politicised “non-objective cinema” which Malevich aspired to create and believed Soviet montage cinema might develop into. I would suggest that Vertov can therefore be regarded as being at least as much a Suprematist film-maker as a Constructivist one (Petrić 1987).

Eisenstein believed that there must be “objective” representation in cinema (as in art generally) in order for there to be an effective political rhetoric. Vertov, on the other hand, would begin with the indexical recording of “life as it is” and move from that to the rhetorical expression of an abstract, symbolic interpretation of that raw material. This movement from the indexical aspects of the cinematic image to its symbolic aspects, linking them together by a process of decoding and explanation is what Vertov referred to as the “kino-eye”: a mechanical eye which did not merely passively record actuality but conceptualised and decoded it, indissolubly linking the indexical and the symbolic aspects of the image. There was therefore no contradiction between the indexical “content” of his films and their rhetorical “form”; rather, there was a fundamental unity of content and form, based upon the dialectical unity of the indexical and symbolic aspects of the cinematic image.

## 8.2 Possible future research

There are several avenues for future research in the area explored by this thesis. For example, the model of transactive rhetoric developed by Alcorn (1987) could be applied to various film sequences of the montage directors. In particular, Vertov seems to have been deliberately exploiting the mismatch between the spectator's narrative expectations which he or she projects onto a film and the actual signifiers (or rather, the *montage* of those signifiers) in his film *The Man with a Movie Camera*, by deliberately triggering and then frustrating those narrative expectations. Vertov was, in effect, absorbing the spectator's projective forces – their usual habits of reading a commercial movie – and deflecting them towards political ends – a political reading of the real world rather than a narrative reading of a fictional world. While Alan Williams (1979) analyses Vertov's strategy within a formalist framework, it might be illuminating to analyse it instead using Alcorn's model of transactive rhetoric. Such an analysis would have the benefit of foregrounding the interaction between the spectator and the filmic text rather than focusing solely on the text itself, as is done in the formalist analysis, and could perhaps give greater insight into the psychoanalytic mechanisms by which Vertov's rhetorical strategy operates on the spectator.

Another avenue for possible future research concerns the intriguing parallel between the retrospective creation of the meaning of a shot or montage fragment, according to the theory of the system of the suture, and C. S. Peirce's idea that every thought is a sign without meaning in itself until that sign is interpreted by a subsequent thought, which he called an "interpretant", so that the meaning of a thought is arrived at by retrospectively interpreting the thought as a sign of a determining object. The meaning of our thoughts is therefore established retrospectively, just like the meaning of a shot in the system of the suture. There may also be a connection here with Eisenstein's belief that montage form was a reconstruction of the processes of human thought itself. Eisenstein had hoped to base such a montage reconstruction of the thought process on his use of "inner monologue", whose theoretical basis was to be the concept of "pre-logical thought" as developed by Lévy-Bruhl. Unfortunately for Eisenstein, Lévy-Bruhl himself later abandoned his own concept of "pre-logical thought" (Aumont 1987:64) and this fact, together with the dangerous accusations of "Idealism" and subjectivism which Eisenstein's suggestion had attracted from hostile Soviet critics, led to his theory of inner monologue being very short-lived. It occurs to me that rather

than basing the montage reconstruction of the thought process on a dubious linguistic model of “pre-logical thought”, it might be given a more secure theoretical foundation by basing it on a semiotic model using the Peircean categorisation of thoughts as signs whose meaning is produced retrospectively, in an analogous way to the method by which the system of the suture retrospectively produces the meaning of a shot. The enunciation of a montage film (i.e. the way meaningful cinematographic statements are constructed out of montage fragments) could then in principle reconstruct the enunciation of human thought (i.e. the way meaning is constructed out of fragmentary thought-signs). This would allow the analysis of Eisenstein’s concept of “intellectual montage” to go beyond a Joycean stream-of-consciousness model or Eikhenbaum’s formalist model for such thought processes to a Peircean semiotic model, which would perhaps be better suited to cinematic rather than literary enunciation. Such an analysis might help to illuminate the way in which montage cinema, especially the “intellectual montage” and the concept of “inner monologue” proposed by Eisenstein, imitates or reconstructs human thought processes.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The montage films which Taylor examines are Eisenstein's *October* (1927) and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), and Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934), the other Soviet film examined being the non-montage film *The Fall of Berlin* (Chiaureli, 1949).

<sup>2</sup>Although Lev Kuleshov stated in 1965 that "[a]lready, in Tsarist Russia there were two progressive directors: Bauer and Protazanov" (Kuleshov 1973:67), to my knowledge these were the only two Tsarist film-makers ever praised by any of the Soviet montage directors.

<sup>3</sup>See Jay Leyda, 'Between Explosions (An Attempt to Repair a Mistaken Judgement)', *Film Quarterly*, July 1970, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 33-38, reprinted as 'A Correction' in Leyda (1983:11-16). Leyda was referring specifically to the films made by pre-revolutionary film-makers in the first few months and years *after* the October Revolution; but since until at least 1919 most film stock, cameras and projection equipment remained in the hands of film-makers and production companies which had been active in the pre-revolutionary period, the period of "Tsarist cinema" can be said to have overlapped that of "Soviet cinema" for at least several years.

<sup>4</sup>Gorky published the review, entitled 'Beglye zametki. Sinematograf Lyum'era' [Fleeting Notes: The Lumière Cinematograph], in *Nizhegorodskii listok* [The Nizhn Novgorod Newsletter], no. 182, 4 July 1896, p. 3, under the pseudonym 'I. M. Pacatus'.

<sup>5</sup>Yuri Tsivian has suggested that the use of the term "illusion" [*illyuzion*] to describe the cinematograph was a regional variant, confined to the south of Russia (1998:21).

<sup>6</sup>In the *Catalogue Général des Vues Cinématographiques Positives de la Collection Lumière* (published in 1900), each scene of *Couronnement du Czar* is listed as a separate item in the catalogue (items 300 to 307 inclusive) (Leyda 1983:405); this is symptomatic of the fact that it was not the film itself which was the "text" of early cinema, but the cinema exhibition as a whole. At this early stage, even the fact that a single event was being filmed (the coronation of a monarch) did not suffice to cohere the film into a single unit in the minds of the cataloguers and (presumably) the exhibitors of the film(s). Each scene was still thought of as being, in an important sense, a separate film. This is probably also related to the fact that each scene itself had been shot in a single, unedited take; it was only once the idea had been established that each individual scene of a film could itself be cut into fragments and then reassembled that it really became possible for multiple scenes to be unified into a single cinematic experience. As Yuri Tsivian has explained, "text boundaries were redefined. It was more and more the film itself (now a multi-shot unit) rather than the film performance that was considered the 'master text' of cinema" (1998:130). For further details of this process, see Tsivian (1998:130-34).

<sup>7</sup>Nicholas II had his own private cinema-theatre installed in the palace at Tsarskoe Selo (Leyda 1983:67). Furthermore, he created the post of "court cinematographer", the occupants of which over the years accumulated a cinematic record of the Romanov family which, in terms of sheer volume, was unparalleled among European royalty at that time.

<sup>8</sup>Nicholas II wrote this comment in the margin of a police report concerning the correspondence of a Duma deputy and an American movie-making company in 1913 (Kenez 2001:24,n.23).

<sup>9</sup>Named after a famous nineteenth-century Russian general, the Skobelev Committee was founded in November 1904 by his sister, Princess N. D. Belosel'skaia-Belozerskaia, as a charitable institution to help the veterans of the Russo-Japanese War. The Committee established

a film section in March 1914. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Skobelev Committee detached itself from the Russian state and continued to make newsreels as a private ‘co-operative’. The political viewpoint of the Skobelev Committee at that time was Socialist Revolutionary (SR) and Menshevik, and it was therefore hostile to the Bolshevik government. The Skobelev Committee was closed down and its property confiscated when the Bolsheviks dispersed the Constituent Assembly and suppressed all rival political parties (Roberts (1999:12-14) and Kenez (2001:25,n.45,29)).

<sup>10</sup>The same strategy of deliberate deception in newsreel films was also being employed in America in the early years of cinema, as Carl Plantinga has pointed out: “every major [American] news film producer in the period 1894-1900 faked news film as a matter of habit” (1997:36).

<sup>11</sup>For Kuleshov’s description of his actual “fabricated landscape” montage experiment see Kuleshov (1987:137), and for an examination of recently discovered footage of the original experiment see Tsivian et al. (1996). The most ambitious use of the montage principle of the “fabricated landscape” is probably Dziga Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which presents a “montage city” constructed from fragments of three real cities – Moscow, Kiev and Odessa (though some material was also filmed in Donbas and in Yalta (Roberts 2000:x)).

<sup>12</sup>Throughout this thesis, the Julian Calendar is used to date the Revolutions of February and October 1917, since these are the months by which the Revolutions are most widely named, though they actually occurred in March and November 1917 by the Gregorian Calendar. The Gregorian Calendar is used for all other dates.

<sup>13</sup>See Leyda (1983:142) for an English translation of the text of the nationalisation decree.

<sup>14</sup>For more details of this protracted process of nationalisation of the Soviet cinema industry see, for example, Taylor (1979:43-50,152-57).

<sup>15</sup>The “agit-steamboat” *Red Star* towed a barge-cinema that could seat an audience of 800 people and included a team of cameramen who filmed the entire three-month voyage, the footage being returned to Moscow and edited by Dziga Vertov (Leyda 1983:138-39).

<sup>16</sup>Eisenstein also had the more general ambition of achieving a “synthesis of art and science” in his films, which would unite the emotional and intellectual effects of montage in an indissoluble unity (Eisenstein 1977:62-63). This would also imply the dissolution of the distinction between agitation and propaganda made by Plekhanov and Lenin.

<sup>17</sup>See Taylor (1979:27-28), (1998:28-29) and Kenez (1985:7-8) for further details.

<sup>18</sup>Jay Leyda has described how “[t]he Russians were shown film programmes almost exclusively French in origin. The first film companies represented in Russia were Pathé Frères (in 1904) and Gaumont, and these pioneers held on to the entire market. If there were other film companies or countries other than France making films, Russian audiences were not aware of them. Pathé particularly occupied a strategic position through the entire period of the pre-revolutionary cinema, developing from the chief Russian distributor to one of the chief Russian producers” (Leyda 1983:24).

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Leyda (1983:111-20) for further details.

<sup>20</sup>Moisei Aleinikov was the head of the Mezhrabpom-Rus studio, which produced Pudovkin’s film *Mother* (1926).

<sup>21</sup>See Eisenstein (1988:144-46) for further details.

<sup>22</sup>Eisenstein’s memoir *Immoral Memories* contains a brief description of his childhood (1983:8-



10).

<sup>23</sup>Esfir Shub (1894-1953) was a Soviet documentary film-maker and editor, and the wife of the Constructivist Alexei Gan. She met Vertov in the early 1920s, and worked with Eisenstein for Goskino as a film re-editor, censoring and re-editing Western films for Soviet release. Her most famous films, compiled from old Tsarist-era newsreels, include *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), *The Great Road* (1927) and *Lev Tolstoy and the Russia of Nikolai II* (1927). She directed the first Soviet documentary film to use sound. Her work influenced that of both Eisenstein and Vertov, but she claimed she was “in the final instance, Vertov’s pupil” (Petric 1978:43,n.11).

<sup>24</sup>Alexander Nikolayevich Ostrovsky (1823-1886) was a Russian writer, famous for his carefully crafted realistic plays and comedies.

<sup>25</sup>Sometimes translated as *The Sage*.

<sup>26</sup>For more details concerning Eisenstein’s production of *Wiseman* see, for example, Eisenstein (1977:3-17), Gerould (1974) and Gordon (1978). See also Kuiper (1961) for details of the general theatrical antecedents of Eisenstein’s film theories.

<sup>27</sup>*Glumov’s Diary* was later incorporated into *Kinopravda No. 16* by Vertov, who was thereby parodying Eisenstein’s parody of his work. See Feldman (1977:116,n.120) for further details.

<sup>28</sup>Vertov later Russified his Jewish patronymic to “Arkadevich” some time after 1918.

<sup>29</sup>His brother Mikhail Kaufman became Vertov’s cameraman during the 1920s before they quarrelled after making *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Another brother, Boris, also a cameraman, emigrated to Belgium and then France with Vertov’s parents in 1919 and worked with Jean Vigo before moving to Hollywood and working on such films as *On the Waterfront* (1954) (for which he won an Academy Award) and *Twelve Angry Men* (1957). Vertov and his brother were briefly reunited in 1929 during Vertov’s trip to western Europe. See Feldman (1977:111,n.60) and Gillespie (2000:67) for further details.

<sup>30</sup>Dziga Vertov wrote an eponymous Futurist poem about his chosen name in September 1920, in which he explored the range of phonetic and acoustic associations evoked by its sound:

dazzling dark here  
 here the wind  
 is dead  
 but hear:  
 spits spin  
 years of yoke jigger  
 tombs topple  
 jingle – a veer!  
 spin the top  
 wehee! wheels whiz  
 jiggling vortex  
 dizzy vertex  
 Dziga Vertov

A transliterated version of the original is as follows: “Dziga Vertov / zdes ni zgi / verte – / veki iga i / grobov verigi / prosto vetrov / gibel / veka na vertel / no – dzin’! – vertet / diski / gong v dver aort / i – ô-go-gó! avtovizgi / vertep rtov / Dziga Vertov” (Tsivian 2004:33).

<sup>31</sup>Several of the other students at the Psychoneurology Institute were also to become leading

figures in the Soviet film industry – the director Abram Room, the cinema historian Grigori Boltyansky and the journalist and writer Mikhail Koltsov (who was to give Vertov his initial opportunity to work in cinema, though initially only as a clerk (Roberts 1999:17)) (Tode and Wurm 2006:12).

<sup>32</sup>The city was later renamed Stalingrad, and is now known as “Volgograd”.

<sup>33</sup>The group founded by Vertov was known as *Kino-glaz*, which means “Kino-Eye” or “Cine-Eye”. I have used the term “Cine-Eye” to denote Vertov’s group in order to avoid possible confusion with his compilation film *Kino-Eye* [*Kino-glaz*, 1924]. The members of the Cine-Eye group were known as *kinoki* (singular *kinok*), which is an abbreviated neologism compounded from the modern Russian word “kino” and the archaic Slavonic word “oko”, meaning “eye” (see Vertov (1984:5,n) and Hicks (2007:17) for further details).

<sup>34</sup>It should be noted that there seems to be some uncertainty as to the exact membership of the Council of Three. It is generally assumed to have consisted of Vertov himself, his brother Mikhail Kaufman and Vertov’s wife Elizaveta Svilova. However, Annette Michelson has noted that Georges Sadoul, in his *Histoire générale du cinéma: L’art muet*, vol. 5 (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1975), lists in addition a man called Belyaev, a painter (Vertov 1984:12,n). Yuri Tsivian has also named Ivan Beliaikov as another member of the Council of Three (Tsivian 2004:24,98,n.7,168,n.5). It is therefore unclear whether the Council of Three actually contained three, four or five members, and it is also unclear whether the number or identity of the members changed over time.

<sup>35</sup>Mikhail Kaufman is referring to the Cine-Eye group.

<sup>36</sup>For a breakdown by genre of Soviet-made films between 1922 and 1933, see Table 4 in Youngblood (1992:33).

<sup>37</sup>Denise Youngblood has expressed it best: “Young Soviet filmmakers may have changed the face of world cinema, but the unvarnished truth is that Soviet audiences in the twenties did not like the pictures that made film history, finding them dull and difficult to understand. Few pictures from the revolutionary avant-garde can be labelled box-office successes with any degree of confidence, not even *Potemkin*, although there was a concerted effort undertaken at the time to correct the record” (1992:5). See also Taylor (1979:95-96) and Roberts (1999:156,n.39).

<sup>38</sup>For details of the numbers of foreign imports compared to Soviet-made films between 1921 and 1933, see Table 1 in Youngblood (1992:20).

<sup>39</sup>For a list of some of the *agitki* released in 1919, see Leyda (1983:135-36). For a detailed description of the content of some representative *agitki* films, see Kenez (2001:32-33,41-43).

<sup>40</sup>Despite this formative influence on Soviet montage cinema, however, Graham Roberts has stated that “the fictional *agitki* of the civil war years were failures in artistic and functional terms” (Roberts 1999:20), implying that it was the *fictional* aspects of the *agitki* which hamstrung them as propaganda and that newsreel was more effective at communicating political points.

<sup>41</sup>See also Tsivian (2004:81-82) for further details of the organisation and methods of work of the *kinoki*.

<sup>42</sup>Alexander Medvedkin toured the Soviet Union in a “film-train” as late as 1932. While strictly speaking not an agit-train (the Order of the People’s Commissariat of Transportation of 29 December 1931 described it as the “the first Soviet film-train”), this “film-train” was

essentially an agit-train devoted solely to cinema, and which could function as a fully-equipped, autonomous and mobile film studio (Leyda (1983:286-87) and Roberts (1999:118-20)).

<sup>43</sup>From the Russian *agitatsionnyi punkt*, an agitational point.

<sup>44</sup>The *Acta Diurna* [Daily Acts] date back to 131 BC, and were presented on message boards in public places such as the Forum of Rome. Their content included the outcomes of trials and legal proceedings, public notices and announcements of prominent births, marriages and deaths. See, for example, the entry for “Acta Diurna” in the Encyclopaedia Britannica Eleventh Edition.

<sup>45</sup>Vertov had considered the abbreviated neologisms *kinkor* and *kinorabkor* before settling on *kinok* to describe his cinema worker-correspondents (Hicks 2007:17). B. Nebyletskii had even written to Vertov in 1926 asking to become a “cine-correspondent” [*kino-korrespondent*] (2007:141,n.56).

<sup>46</sup>See Hicks (2007:16-18) for further details of the parallelism between the “worker-correspondent” movement and Vertov’s Cine-Eye group.

<sup>47</sup>See Tode and Wurm (2006:197-98) for Vertov’s sketches and descriptions of the central “Creative Laboratory” where Vertov proposed the films of the *kinoki* network would be edited. See also Vertov (1984:137-42) for his description of the proposed “Creative Laboratory”.

<sup>48</sup>For further details concerning the growth of the network of commercial cinemas in Tsarist Russia, see Leyda (1983:17-89), Taylor (1979:1-25), Tsivian (1998:15-49) and Kenez (2001:9-25).

<sup>49</sup>See Drew (1986:129-31) for details of the use of *Intolerance* as propaganda for an explicitly political campaign against Prohibition. The political effects of Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) are so notorious as to require no further elaboration here; see, for example, Geduld (1971:116-17).

<sup>50</sup>This censorship worked both ways, of course: the Soviet montage films were themselves re-edited and censored before being released in the West, also for ideological and political reasons.

<sup>51</sup>Kuleshov’s film *The Death Ray* (1925), made in collaboration with Pudovkin.

<sup>52</sup>For example, Jay Leyda has even claimed that “[n]o Soviet film of importance made within the following ten years was to be completely outside *Intolerance*’s sphere of influence” (1983:143).

<sup>53</sup>In his *Order to the Arts Army* (1918), he proclaimed:

Comrades!  
 Man the barricades!  
 barricades of souls and hearts.  
 [...]
 The streets are the brushes we’ll use,  
 our palettes the city squares.  
 [...]
 Futurists, out on the street –  
 drummers and makers of rhyme! (Mayakovsky 2000:32-33).

<sup>54</sup>In the language of Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Mayakovsky was calling for the re-integration of the autonomous institution of art into the praxis of everyday life (Bürger 1984).

<sup>55</sup>See also Henderson (1978:161,n.4).

<sup>56</sup>See Henderson (1973) for further details of the role of cinema in Mayakovsky's artistic career.

<sup>57</sup>See Petrić (1987:32,n) for further details. Two of Mayakovsky's unproduced film scenarios have been translated and published in *Screen*, Winter 1971/2, Volume 12, Number 4, pp. 122-49.

<sup>58</sup>The New Economic Policy (NEP) was an economic policy implemented in the Soviet Union between 1921 and 1928 to prevent the Soviet economy from collapsing in the aftermath of the Civil War. Allowing some private ventures, the NEP allowed small businesses to reopen for private profit while the state continued to control banks, foreign trade, and large industries.

<sup>59</sup>*Kino-fot* was a film journal edited by Aleksei Gan, the Constructivist theorist and husband of Esfir Shub, which championed the cause of avant-garde cinema.

<sup>60</sup>Petrić is quoting Annette Michelson here (1984:lxix).

<sup>61</sup>Vertov is making a pun here on the Russian word *mayak*, or "beacon".

<sup>62</sup>The word *zaum* could be translated as "beyondsense". It was used to describe the creation of poetic neologisms with no literal meaning in Russian Futurist poetry.

<sup>63</sup>This extreme limit of the complete detachment of signifiers from their signifieds cannot actually be reached, of course, without the signifiers ceasing to exist as signifiers. As Saussure emphasised, there can be no signifiers without signifieds.

<sup>64</sup>See, for example, Miller (2005:14).

<sup>65</sup>As Mark Crispin Miller has noted, "*propaganda* was a term so unimportant that there is no definition for it in the great 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* (which does include a short entry for *propagate*)" (Miller 2005:11).

<sup>66</sup>Taylor is citing J. A. C. Brown, *Techniques of Persuasion: From Propaganda to Brainwashing*, Harmondsworth 1963, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup>As Ellul has noted, Goebbels "never stopped battling for propaganda to be as accurate as possible. He preferred being cynical and brutal to being caught in a lie. He used to say: 'Everybody must know what the situation is.' [...] All this is so true that pinning the title of Big Liar on Goebbels must be considered quite a propaganda success" (1973:54,n).

<sup>68</sup>Unfortunately, Trotsky's vision of cinema replacing vodka as the "opium of the people" never did come true. As Kenz notes, "At the end of the 1920s, the yearly income from the vodka monopoly was approximately a half-billion roubles, while movies brought in a paltry 15 million" (1985:219).

<sup>69</sup>Mosselprom was a state-run department store in Moscow.

<sup>70</sup>The official Soviet news agency was known as ROSTA, the Russian Telegraph Agency (*Rossiiskoe telegrafnoe agentstvo*), during the first half of the 1920s and thereafter as TASS, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union at the USSR Cabinet of Ministers (*Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soyuza pri kabinete ministrov SSSR*).

<sup>71</sup>Kuleshov is almost certainly referring to the idea expressed in Eisenstein's 1929 article entitled 'Perspectives':

The principle of the organisation of thinking is in actual fact the 'content' of a work.

A principle that materialises in the sum total of socio-physiological stimulants and for which form serves as a means of *disclosure*.

Nobody believes that the content of a newspaper consists of a report about the Kellogg

Pact, a scandal from the *Gazette de France* or an account of an everyday event like a drunken husband murdering his wife with a hammer on waste ground.

The *content* [*soderzhanie*] of a newspaper is the principle by which the *contents* [*soderzhimoe*] are organised and processed, with the aim of processing the reader from a class-based standpoint.

Herein lies the production-based inseparability of the sum total of content and form from *ideology*.

Herein lies the gulf that separates the content of a proletarian newspaper from the content of a bourgeois newspaper even though their factual contents are the same. (Eisenstein 1988:154)

<sup>72</sup>Ellul contrasts his own distinction between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda with Lenin's distinction (following Plekhanov) between "agitation" and "propaganda", claiming that his distinction "corresponds in part to the well-known distinction of Lenin between 'agitation' and 'propaganda' – but here the meaning of these terms is reversed" (Ellul 1973:71). It is therefore important not to conflate the concepts of "agitation" and "agitation propaganda", as defined here.

<sup>73</sup>The Americans themselves were among the first to acknowledge this. Edward Bernays asserted in 1928 that "[t]he American motion picture is the greatest unconscious carrier of propaganda in the world today. It is a great distributor for ideas and opinions" (2005:166).

<sup>74</sup>Kenez also specifically decides not to make a distinction between "agitation" and "propaganda", stating that "[t]he distinction between agitation and propaganda is not a helpful one" (1985:8).

<sup>75</sup>Presumably, in Taylor's view the "real value" of the films in question would not include their value as propaganda.

<sup>76</sup>In John Ford's Western *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), the journalist tears up the pages on which his colleague has written down the old senator's true story and tells him: "In the West, when the legend is more beautiful than the truth, we print the legend."

<sup>77</sup>Ivan Beliakov (1897-1967) was a cameraman, animator and graphic artist who was a member of Dziga Vertov's "Council of Three" from 1922 (Tsivian 2004:24;98,n.7;168,n.5). He collaborated with Alexander Rodchenko to create the intertitles for many of Vertov's films, most notably *Kinopravda* (1922-1925) and *Kino-Eye* (1924) (2004:60), and was an assistant cameraman for several of Vertov's films of the 1920s.

<sup>78</sup>Graham Roberts has noted the irony of the fact that Vertov and Kaufman were barred from the conclusion of the SRs' trial which they had worked so hard to publicise (Roberts 1999:23). It may have been the fact that he was prevented from filming the conclusion of the trial which prompted Vertov to stage the street scenes.

<sup>79</sup>Jacques Aumont quotes Eisenstein as saying about the figure of Ivan the Terrible: "The image, we are the ones who make the image. We should show our feelings about him (the character)." As Aumont says, "That was Eisenstein's way of responding to the implied reproach that he was not sticking closely enough to the 'historical sources.' It is quite clear – he preferred to produce them himself" (1987:216,n.58).

<sup>80</sup>As O'Shaughnessy has pointed out, "The identity of propaganda in the late twentieth century shifted fundamentally in so many ways. It is especially true that propaganda is now no

longer the exclusive prerogative of the holders of power: communications technology, particularly the internet, makes self-authorship possible. Everybody now can be a propagandist. Not even money is entirely necessary. All that is needed is determination" (2004:33). Ellul's distinction between vertical and horizontal propaganda is therefore even more valid now than when he formulated it in the 1960s.

<sup>81</sup>As Richard Taylor has noted (1998:224,n.33), the Russian verb *zarazhat'* can mean either "to infect" or "to poison". Tolstoy was famously ambivalent about the moral value of art and its "infectiousness" towards the end of his life.

<sup>82</sup>Bacon was responding less to the montage in Eisenstein's films than to their pictorialism, to what Kuleshov called Eisenstein's "infinite savouring of these photogenic pieces of film" (Kuleshov 1987:69), a quality which was apparent even in his first film *Strike*.

<sup>83</sup>Pudovkin's first full-length film was a documentary about the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov's work on conditioned reflexes, *The Mechanics of the Brain*. See, for example, Sargeant (2000:29-54) for an analysis of the film and of the relationship between Russian physiology and Pudovkin's earliest theoretical ideas about film montage. However, unlike Eisenstein, Pudovkin never explicitly formulated an account of the effectivity of film montage in terms of reflexology.

<sup>84</sup>Boris Sokolov's film *Russian Ark* (2002) is a notable exception, having been filmed in a single unedited take on a digital video camera.

<sup>85</sup>See Denkin (1977) for a brief analysis of the application of linguistic models to cinema by Eisenstein and Vertov.

<sup>86</sup>The "system of the suture" (see, for example, Oudart (1978) and Dayan (1974)), based as it is on concepts from Lacanian psychoanalysis, explicitly evokes the entry of the subject into the Symbolic order and thereby into language during the mirror stage of an infant's development. The mirror stage in Lacanian psychoanalysis could be described, without too much exaggeration, as "the linguistic construction of the self".

<sup>87</sup>See Russell (2005) for an analysis of the Kuleshov Effect in terms of Barthes' concept of the "death of the Author".

<sup>88</sup>It must always be borne in mind that Eisenstein's interest in Freud was not merely abstract or apolitical; as Nesbet has pointed out, "Eisenstein's emphasis was to be on exploiting, rather than merely 'exposing' the subconscious: the discoveries of Freud were to be put to work in the service of Marx" (Nesbet 2007:13). This political use of Freud's work is indicative of the fact that Eisenstein, unlike the Soviet government itself, saw no contradiction between Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism.

<sup>89</sup>Lapsley and Westlake are quoting Heath (1981:88).

<sup>90</sup>Projection was defined by Sigmund Freud in 'Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (1896), the Schreber case history (1911), 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915) and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920). It was later further refined by his daughter Anna Freud.

<sup>91</sup>See Dickinson and de la Roche (1948:37) and Sargeant (2000:143-49) for further details.

<sup>92</sup>It is doubtful whether there is in fact any kind of film which does not require the active participation of the spectator's subjectivity in constituting the film's signification as discourse, though the spectator may not be conscious of that activity. For example, David Bordwell has reminded us of the extent to which even watching a Hollywood movie in the "classical style" requires the active (though largely non-conscious) participation of the spectator (Bordwell et al.

1985:37-41).

<sup>93</sup>André Bazin asserted that “[t]he well-known experiment of Kuleshov with the shot of Mozhukhin in which a smile [*sic*] was seen to change its significance according to the image that preceded it, sums up perfectly the properties of montage” (Bazin 2005:25).

<sup>94</sup>These other montage experiments could of course also be analysed using Alcorn’s concept of projective idealisation; doing so here, however, would constitute too much of a digression.

<sup>95</sup>In his address to the Film Society in Stewart’s Café, Regent Street, London on 3 February 1929, Pudovkin stated that “Kuleshov and I conducted an interesting experiment” (Pudovkin 2006:160 and 309-10, n.116).

<sup>96</sup>Signifiers cannot be completely separated from their signifieds, of course, without losing their status as signifiers. As Saussure emphasised, there can be no signifiers without signifieds, and vice versa.

<sup>97</sup>I shall examine this aspect of Soviet montage cinema in more detail in chapter 7 of this thesis.

<sup>98</sup>See Yampolsky (1991) for an examination of the importance of the theory of acting to the early development of film montage in the Kuleshov Workshop.

<sup>99</sup>Prince and Hensley ultimately conclude that “Kuleshov’s claims to empirical truth cannot be verified for the simple reason we can never again precisely replicate the sample of people to whom he showed his original footage” (1992:73).

<sup>100</sup>See Prince and Hensley (1992:67-68) for an analysis of this issue.

<sup>101</sup>See Bordwell et al. (1985:1-84) for a summary of the nature and influence of the Hollywood continuity style.

<sup>102</sup>In an interview in 1965, Kuleshov described his early film *Engineer Prite’s Project* (1917) as “the first Russian film made according to the conception of montage, with images deliberately planned and assembled according to the laws of editing” (Kuleshov 1973:67-68).

<sup>103</sup>The same process was happening in reverse during the same period: for example, the *agitka* film *Brigade Commander Ivanov* (1923) was censored and edited before being released to American audiences (Kenez 2001:42,46, n.60). In Britain, public exhibition of Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin* (1926) was banned altogether until the 1950s, with only private showings of the film being permitted.

<sup>104</sup>Kuleshov stated that Yevgeni Bauer and Yakov Protazanov were the only two “progressive” film directors in Tsarist cinema (Kuleshov 1973:67). In this context, Kuleshov was using the word “progressive” primarily in its aesthetic sense. Protazanov in particular could never have been accused of being *politically* progressive.

<sup>105</sup>Tsivian notes that “the average shot length of Yevgeni Bauer’s *Silent Witnesses* (1914) is 50 seconds at projection speed 20 fps” (Tsivian 1998:80).

<sup>106</sup>As Kristin Thompson describes, “[d]uring the primitive period [...] [e]ven dreams, visions, and memories were seen in superimposition over only part of the frame, with the character still visible in the long shot, thus minimizing the subjective effect and keeping the narration omniscient” (1985:162-63).

<sup>107</sup>This nostalgia manifested itself in the Soviet Union in cinema architecture as well as film-making technique, as Tsivian has pointed out: “There was a clear tendency in the cinema architecture of the 1920s to return to the proto-Constructivist simplicity of the sciolistic period

of pre-1908. ‘Laying bare’ the technology was central to both the first and the last periods of silent film culture (albeit for completely different reasons)” (1998:45).

<sup>108</sup>As Vance Kepley has pointed out, “[t]he familiar story that *Intolerance* first reached the USSR after it somehow slipped through an anti-Soviet blockade is apocryphal. In fact the film was imported well before the revolution. [...] Italian Jacques Cibrario, who headed the Transatlantic film distribution firm, brought *Intolerance* into Russia in 1916. [...] Consequently, the film gathered dust on a shelf somewhere in Russia until after the revolution. Not until 1918 did a special government decision clear the way for *Intolerance* to be shown commercially in the USSR” (Kepley 1979:24). See also Semen Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii*, Moscow: Iskuststvo, 1963, pp. 273-74. The apocryphal story is repeated in, most notably, Leyda (1983:142) and Mast (1971:190). Cibrario, of course, later became notorious for embezzling more than a million dollars from the Soviet government in a fraudulent business deal to acquire much-needed film stock from the United States. See, for example, Leyda (1983:126-28) for the sordid details.

<sup>109</sup>It is this process, of course, which qualifies the cinematic institution as one of Althusser’s Institutional State Apparatuses (ISAs) (Althusser 2008:16-22).

<sup>110</sup>See Taylor (2003) and Nelson (1980) for further details of Taylor’s system of “scientific management”.

<sup>111</sup>For a recent study of Gastev and Soviet Taylorism, see Vaingurt (2008).

<sup>112</sup>Film studios were always known as “film factories” [*kinofabriki*] in Russia, even in Tsarist times. It was only on 4 January 1936 that they were officially renamed as “film studios” [*kinostudii*], probably as part of Boris Shumyatsky’s abortive ambition to establish a “Soviet Hollywood” on the Black Sea coast (Taylor and Christie (1988:xvi), Pudovkin (2006:305,n.80)).

<sup>113</sup>The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

<sup>114</sup>See, for example, Burch (1979:82) and Metz (1982a:7) for further details.

<sup>115</sup>In this respect, I regard it as significant that Kuleshov was fascinated by the fast-paced slapstick comedies of Mack Sennett or Harold Lloyd, far more than by the feature-length character-based narrative films which were also becoming popular in America at that time. See, for example, his praise of Chaplin (Kuleshov 1987:56-57) and his belief that the way forward for cinema as an artistic medium was to emulate those American films which appealed most of all to the uneducated lower-class audience – comedies and thrillers which concentrated on movement and action. As Kuleshov put it, “The pivot of any suspense story, and especially of an American thriller script, is the rapidly mounting intensity of action, and nothing is so detrimental to film as the literary psychological drama, i.e., an apparently actionless plot. American films are successful because they focus on the cinematic: maximum movement and heroic romantic adventure” (Kuleshov 1987:40). Psychologism and individualism were deprecated by the montage directors.

<sup>116</sup>Of course, the additional factor of deliberate obtuseness on the part of Eisenstein due to his personal dislike of Vertov cannot be ruled out.

<sup>117</sup>See Lacan (1977) for more details, and see also Heath (1981:77-84) for a basic exposition of the aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis relevant to the concept of “suture”.

<sup>118</sup>There is, according to Lacan, a third order: the Real. Lacan defines the Real as that which the Imaginary seeks to image and which the Symbolic seeks to symbolise. The Real eludes all



such attempts to imagine or symbolise it, however, while still having an effectivity.

<sup>119</sup>Jean-Louis Baudry has pointed out the similarity between the situation of the infant during the mirror stage and that of a spectator in the cinema: “for this imaginary constitution of the self to be possible, there must be [...] two complementary conditions: immature powers of mobility and a precocious maturation of visual organization [...]. If one considers that these two conditions are repeated during cinematographic projection – suspension of mobility and predominance of the visual function – perhaps one could suppose that this is more than a simple analogy” (Baudry 1999:353).

<sup>120</sup>Lacan himself examined only the development of the male child. Later work has been done by feminist critics to apply Lacanian psychoanalytic principles to the development of the female infant (see, for example, Mulvey (1975) and Grosz (1990)). For the purposes of this thesis, I shall follow Lacan and examine only the mirror stage in the development of the male child and apply it to male spectatorship of the cinema.

<sup>121</sup>As Heath also points out, there has always been a link between psychoanalysis and language: “psychoanalysis, the ‘talking-cure’, developed precisely as an acute attention to the movement of the subject in the signifying chain” (1981:79). In Dayan’s words, “The psychoanalyst’s task is, through the patient’s speech, to re-link the patient to the symbolic order, from which he has received his particular mental configuration” (1974:24). Lacan’s analysis of the linguistic construction of subjectivity is therefore more a change of emphasis rather than a radical break with Freudian psychoanalysis.

<sup>122</sup>Lacan uses the term “Other” to make a distinction between the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. The lower-case ‘o’ (*petit-a*) refers to the imaginary relations with the “other” that occur within the Imaginary, whereas the capital ‘O’ represents the Law of the Father and the threat of castration; that is, “decapitation”, being decapitalised from ‘O’ to ‘o’.

<sup>123</sup>Barry Salt, in his analysis of the textual procedures of classical cinema, has demonstrated that the shot/reverse-angle shot comprises only 30-40 percent of the total number of cuts in Hollywood narrative films from the 1930s onwards (Salt 1977:52).

<sup>124</sup>Since the subject does not pre-exist its constitution by ideology, the pre-ideological individual is an abstraction with no concrete existence since, in Althusser’s words, “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects [...]: *individuals are always-already subjects*. Hence individuals are ‘abstract’ with respect to the subjects which they always-already are” (Althusser 2008:49-50; original emphasis).

<sup>125</sup>See Althusser (2008:44-51) for further details.

<sup>126</sup>Edward Said recalled watching Hollywood movies as a boy and always siding with the white colonialist hero against the native population (Lapsley and Westlake 2006:258).

<sup>127</sup>Ellul was referring specifically to “public and human relations” when he made his comment, but since his description of the functioning of public and human relations applies equally well to cinema as an institution, his conclusion that they are a form of propaganda also applies to cinema.

<sup>128</sup>The repetition of the two-shot kernel of the Kuleshov Effect experiment with different images in shot one (e.g., a bowl of soup, a coffin, a young woman, etc.) and Mozzhukhin’s identical blank face in shot two serves to demonstrate that *different* emotions can be ascribed to the same footage of Mozzhukhin’s expressionless face by the viewer. For the purposes of

analysing the Kuleshov Effect in terms of the system of the suture, however, only the two-shot kernel itself is strictly necessary.

<sup>129</sup>As Bazin put it, “The meaning is not in the image, it is in the shadow of the image projected by montage onto the field of consciousness of the spectator” (2005:26).

<sup>130</sup>Dayan refers here to the suturing process in Baroque painting, but his assertion applies equally well to classical cinema.

<sup>131</sup>It is important not to conflate the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdung*, which is often translated as “alienation”, with the Russian Formalists’ concept of *ostranenie*, or “making strange”, which represented a purely aesthetic renewal of perception. Brechtian *Verfremdung* is specifically political and social rather than merely aesthetic in its effect.

<sup>132</sup>“Syntagmatic” refers to the relationship between linguistic units in a construction or sequence, such as the relationship between the letter “n” and its adjacent letters in the words “not”, “ant” and “ton”. “Paradigmatic” refers to the set of substitutional or oppositional relationships a linguistic unit has with other units, such as the relationship between the letter “n” in the word “not” and other letters which could be substituted for it in the same context, such as “t” or “p”.

<sup>133</sup>Although Bordwell is correct when he asserts that “[c]lassical films call forth activities on the part of the spectator. These activities may be highly standardized and comparatively easy to learn, but we cannot assume that they are simple” (1985:7), such activities are largely non-conscious. Pudovkin is referring to the *conscious* activity required of a spectator watching a montage film.

<sup>134</sup>Pudovkin sometimes refers to the slow-motion effect as “Zeitlupe”, which was the German term for a high-speed camera used to produce such slow-motion effects (2006:313,n.153).

<sup>135</sup>He now calls it “[d]eeply mistaken in many ways”, noting that “some writers think I still hold to views expressed here – neglecting my refinement of them in *The Cinema of Eisenstein*.” See Bordwell’s website: <http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/annotated.php>. Retrieved 3 July 2008.

<sup>136</sup>As Bazin rather dialectically put it, “It is because cinema as the art of space and time is the contrary of painting that it has something to add to it” (2005:143).

<sup>137</sup>Malevich is using the phrase “leftist tendencies” to imply specifically that they were artistically avant-garde rather than necessarily politically left-wing, though of course they were actually both.

<sup>138</sup>Malevich later reversed his negative judgement of easel painting. In a 1927 letter to Moholy-Nagy, Malevich wrote that “the machine cannot express spiritual sensations, cannot be considered a good medium, when both brush and pencil are superlative to it in a technical sense, for through them various sensations can flow in all their force” (Malevich 1978:158). This tendency to reverse earlier judgements and to make contradictory statements at different times was somewhat characteristic of Malevich; Charlotte Douglas talks of the way in which the apparent reversals of Malevich’s ideas and painting styles, his reversion to earlier positions, would “annoy” and “embarrass” future art historians (1978:301).

<sup>139</sup>The image of Rodchenko’s painting was actually printed upside-down in *Kino-fot*, almost certainly unintentionally.

<sup>140</sup>The music for the opera was composed by Mikhail Matiushin and the main text was by

Alexei Kruchenykh, with a prologue written primarily by Velimir Khlebnikov. The opera was performed as part of a double bill with Mayakovsky's autobiographical play *Vladimir Mayakovsky. A Tragedy. Victory over the Sun* was a Cubo-Futurist parody of Russian Symbolism, a literary movement whose adherents often used the image of the Sun as a symbol of their transcendence over the material world. For example, one of the published collections of Konstantin Balmont's Symbolist poetry was titled *We Shall Be As the Sun* (1903). The "victory over the Sun" was therefore a symbolic victory by the Cubo-Futurists over the Symbolist movement itself.

<sup>141</sup>See, for example, Kepley (1986) for further details.

<sup>142</sup>Peirce categorised signs into three "trichotomies" or typologies, each containing three classes, depending respectively on (i) the sign itself, (ii) the sign's relation to its signified object, and (iii) the sign's relation to its interpretant. According to Peirce, every sign falls under one class or another within all three of the trichotomies (Peirce 1991:31).

<sup>143</sup>Victor Tupitsyn is referring here to the semiotic categories devised by C. S. Peirce. See Peirce (1991) for his own description of his "second trichotomy of signs", and Wollen (1997:116-54) for an application of Peirce's semiotics to cinema.

<sup>144</sup>The conventional, symbolic aspect of the photographic image is due, among other causes, to the fact that the photographic apparatus is based on the principles of Renaissance perspective (see, for example, Baudry (1999:347)) and uses those conventional principles to render a three-dimensional image on a flat two-dimensional surface.

<sup>145</sup>André Bazin based much of his film criticism on the indexicality of the photographic and cinematic image. Although he did not use Peirce's terminology, his meaning is unambiguous: "The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint" (Bazin 2005:15).

<sup>146</sup>This definition of the iconic aspect of the cinematic image differs significantly from that given by Plantinga, who claims that "[t]he photograph, whether still or moving, functions as an icon when it presents visual information similar to that available to an observer at the profilmic scene" (Plantinga 1997:53). Wollen's definition of the icon seems to me to be closer to that intended by Peirce: the *likeness* of an object, its illusionistic representation, which need have no necessary connection with what a hypothetical observer would have experienced at the profilmic scene. I shall therefore follow Wollen's usage rather than Plantinga's.

<sup>147</sup>See Vertov (1990) for the full text of the intertitles to Vertov's film *Three Songs of Lenin*, with accompanying stills.

<sup>148</sup>The word "symbolic" is here being used in its Lacanian psychoanalytic sense rather than in its Peircean semiotic sense.

<sup>149</sup>Malevich was using a neologism invented by Aleksei Khruchenykh, who defined it as follows: "*Sdvig* conveys the movement and space. *Sdvig* gives polysemantic and diversity. *Sdvig* is the style of contemporaneity [...]" (qtd. in Tupitsyn 2002a:164,n.146).

<sup>150</sup>The creation of photograms was an artistic technique used by El Lissitzky and Rodchenko, both of whom were associated with the Productivist movement.

<sup>151</sup>Petrić, despite the title of his 1987 book, does not unequivocally regard Vertov as a Constructivist film-maker. He had earlier written that "Vertov, unlike Kuleshov, never wished to apply the extreme Constructivist approach to cinema, regardless of the fact that he conceived

many of his films ‘constructively.’” (Petrić 1978:34). Graham Roberts has also denied that Vertov should be regarded as essentially a Constructivist film-maker: “by the time of *The Man with the Movie Camera* Vertov [...] had developed a visual style which is not so much *Constructivist* as *productionist*” (Roberts 2000:93; original emphasis), by which Roberts means something distinct from the Productivist avant-garde movement of the 1920s.

<sup>152</sup>Petrić seems to think its ontology is such that it thereby automatically convinces the spectator (by what means, Petrić does not make clear) that the events shown on the screen “occur[ed] ‘for real’”; in fact, what he describes is more like the “reality effect” produced by the system of the suture in classical cinema – the diametrical opposite of what Vertov stood for – than anything else.

<sup>153</sup>Malevich adopted the term “cine-form” from Alexei Gan.

<sup>154</sup>The newsreel footage of Lenin could therefore be thought of as a “veronika”, a true image not made by human hands, in the same way that the Turin Shroud, to those who consider it a genuine religious relic, is a direct imprint of Christ, an indexical sign of divinity. Bazin makes the same comparison between the photographic or cinematic image and the Turin Shroud in his essay ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’: “the Holy Shroud of Turin combines the features alike of relic and photograph” (2005:14,n).

<sup>155</sup>Malevich is here referring to *bytie*, the mundane everyday life (or “life’s ugly mug” as he called it (Malevich 1968a:226)), a concept to which Mayakovsky and other avant-garde artists of the time in Russia also often referred. It usually held negative connotations for them, and represented the unworked raw material of lived experience which had to be transformed into something worthwhile by art or by politics.

<sup>156</sup>Sometimes also translated as “the global image”.

<sup>157</sup>AKhRR was the acronym for *Assotsiatsia Khudozhnikov Revoliutsionnoi Rossii* [Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia] (1922-28), which later became known as AKhR, or *Assotsiatsia Khudozhnikov Revoliutsii* [Association of Artists of the Revolution] (1928-33). The group actually formed within the *Peredvizhniki* [Wanderers] movement before 1917 (for example, the last chairman of the *Peredvizhniki* movement, Pavel Radimov, was a founder member of AKhRR) and was firmly opposed to avant-garde art, preferring a realist treatment of social themes. During the cultural revolution of 1932-33, AKhRR served as the nucleus of the Stalinist Union of Artists of the USSR before itself being liquidated as an organisation.

<sup>158</sup>Mayakovsky’s “AKhRR leftist line” to which Malevich refers was a politically rather than an aesthetically leftist position; Malevich regarded AKhRR as politically leftist but artistically reactionary. By aligning himself with AKhRR in the late 1920s, Mayakovsky was widely seen as having implicitly renounced his own earlier position on the artistic avant-garde.

<sup>159</sup>The concept of the “ontological authenticity” of the indexical image is very similar to Bazin’s belief in the “credibility” of the photographic image: “This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making” (Bazin 2005:13).

<sup>160</sup>Pudovkin followed Eisenstein in wishing to start with a pre-existing concept and shape the raw material to embody that concept, to impose a particular viewpoint on the raw material and on the spectator. In his own words, he wished “to force even people with opposing views to be disturbed, directly and against their will” (Pudovkin 2006:23).

<sup>161</sup>See, for example, Kenez (2001:70-71) and Pudovkin (2006:301,n.24) for further details.

<sup>162</sup>Feldman gives a slightly different account of Vertov's famous slow-motion leap, describing it as a leap "from the second story balcony of the Kino Committee's headquarters" (1977:36).

<sup>163</sup>Bazin has made similar claims, asserting that "[i]t is only an increased realism of the image that can support the abstraction of montage" (2005:39). By "realism", Bazin essentially meant the Peircean indexicality of the image, which he sometimes called the "mummy-complex" (2005:14,n), rather than iconic representation.

<sup>164</sup>Feldman was commenting on one of Vertov's early Futurist poems, *Start* (1917):

Not like Pathé  
     Not like Gaumont.  
 Not how they see,  
     Not as they want.  
 Be Newton  
     to see  
         an apple.  
 Give people eyes  
 To see a dog  
 With  
     Pavlov's  
         eye.  
 Is cinema CINEMA?  
*We blow up* cinema,  
 For  
     CINEMA  
         to be seen. (Qtd. in Tsivian 2004:35)

<sup>165</sup>See Tode and Wurm (2006:93) and Michelson (1979) for further details.

<sup>166</sup>The endless repeatability of a film is reminiscent of Nietzsche's myth of "eternal recurrence", in which the endless and exact repetition of a temporal sequence has the effect of removing the quality of temporality from each passing moment, creating a sense of timelessness while still (unlike simply freezing time) allowing human experience to unfold.

<sup>167</sup>Bazin declared the role of montage in revealing the truth about reality when he wrote in his essay 'The Virtues and Limitations of Montage': "Take, for example, a documentary about conjuring! If its object is to show the extraordinary feats of a great master then the film must proceed in a series of individual shots, but if the film is required subsequently to explain one of these tricks, it becomes necessary to edit them. The case is clear, so let us move on!" (2005:51). Bazin is implying here that the long take is best at *representing* reality, whereas to *reveal* the tricks hidden behind the surface appearances of reality, editing and montage are called for. Vertov's treatment of the scenes involving the Chinese conjurer in *Kino-Eye* and *The Man with a Movie Camera* is significant: he uses montage to *reveal* the conjurer's tricks, in the same way that he also reveals the illusionistic tricks of commercial fictional cinema.

<sup>168</sup>For details concerning Lenin's growing interest in the philosophy of Hegel after 1914, see Anderson (1995).

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